

WHO SOJOURNERS

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FORBIDDEN
TERRITORY**

An excerpt from
Jim Wallis'
new book,
Christ in Crisis

IS

MY

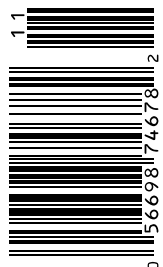
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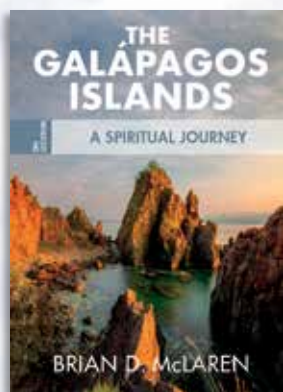


November 2019

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Vol.48 No.10

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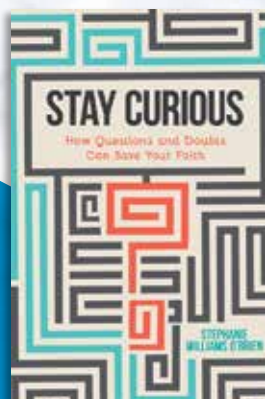
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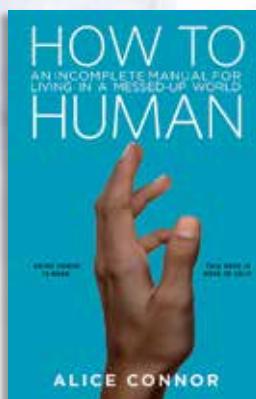
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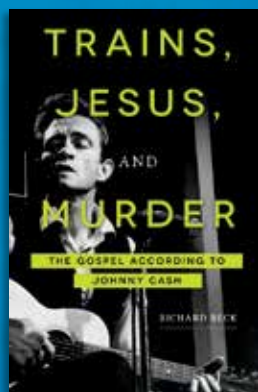
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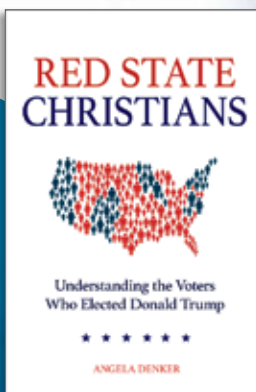
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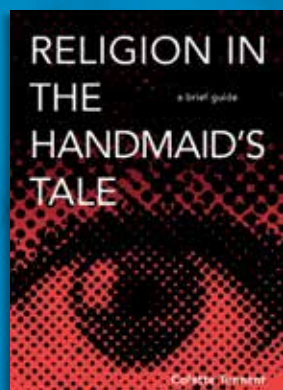
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**“THE OPPOSITE OF LOVING YOUR
NEIGHBOR IS BEING INDIFFERENT
TO THEM.”**

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Neighbor?**

My worldview has
been changed by
meeting people I
was not supposed
to know.

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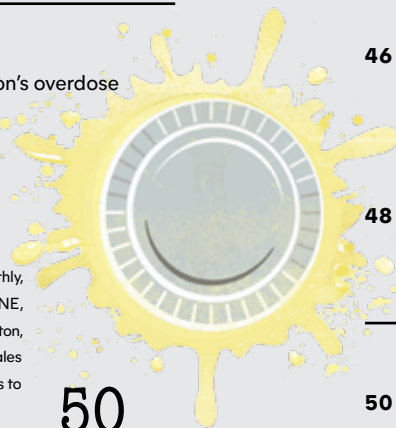


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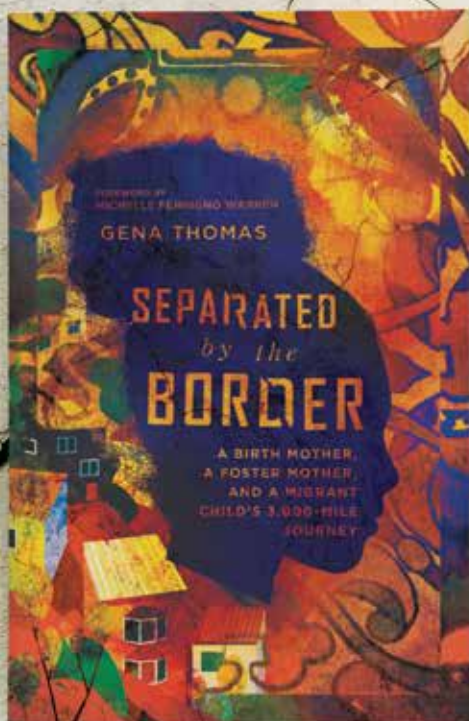


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Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly, except September-October is combined, at 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Correction: The volume on our Sept/Oct issue was incorrect; it should have been Vol. 48, No. 9.



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**CANDLER
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From the Editor

"Humility" has often been understood as involving self-abasement, low self-regard, and meekness. Merriam-Webster's definition of humble refers to "a spirit of deference or submission." It's not surprising, with those meanings in mind, that the instruction to "be humble" has been used as a tool of oppression over the years against women and marginalized people—a not-so-subtle call to "stay in your place" and not rock the boat.

But, as author Pearl Maria Barros explains in this issue, the Christian virtue of humility has nothing to do with being passive or subservient—that's "false humility." True humility entails recognizing that our skills and talents are gifts from God, meant to be used for the greater good. We are called to use our gifts and our privilege not for self-aggrandizement but to engage in the task of building a more just society. That kind of humility, Barros explains, contains a truth with the power to change the world.

RESPONSE

Enemy Mine

"You have my attention *Sojourners*," commented @ryanjpemberton in response to the Sept/Oct 2019 cover story ("Love Your Enemy? First You Have to Know Who They Are," by Melissa Florer-Bixler). In the essay, which was accompanied by a black and white illustration of an unsmiling ICE agent, Florer-Bixler advocated "rightly having enemies" as an "unsung discipline of the Christian life." "This is powerful stuff," added the London Catholic Worker (@Lndn-CathWorker), "in too many Christian circles we pretend people are not our enemies." Others pointed out that *admitting* we have enemies is one thing, but *loving* them is far more challenging: "I think as progressives we have to evaluate ourselves as well on this issue," said Ryan White.

Write us: response@sojo.net



"KINDNESS AND COMPAS- SION TOWARD ALL LIVING THINGS IS A MARK OF A CIVILIZED SOCIETY."

César Chávez

co-founder, United Farm Workers

CONTRIBUTING



Ken Davis

When illustrating a magazine article, "I intentionally don't make a plan," says Ken Davis. "I just try to immerse myself in the topic, clear my mind, and let the words and images and sketches come to me." Davis is a writer and freelance illustrator whose work has appeared in *Sojourners* for more than a decade (see p. 50). "In 2009, I pitched my portfolio to places that aligned with my values," says Davis. "I pitched my work that year to *Sojourners*, and the rest is history."



Pearl Maria Barros

Catholic feminist Pearl Maria Barros, assistant professor of religious studies at Santa Clara University, fell in love with theology in her grandmother's living room. "I had all these questions I would raise"—like why women weren't priests—"and we'd have debates." In "The Power of Humility" (p.28), Barros engages the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana theorist and activist whose work helped Barros discover her academic vocation: "Her writing made me feel like there's a place in this for me."

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Michelle Alexander, Diana Butler Bass, Walter Brueggemann, Joan Chittister, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan Collum, Michael Curry, Edwidge Danticat, Marie Dennis, Julian DeShazier, E.J. Dionne Jr., Kelly Brown Douglas, Joshua DuBois, Michael Eric Dyson, Reta Halteman Finger, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, Eddie Glaude, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, David Gushee, Cynthia L. Hale, Lisa Sharon Harper, Jen Hatmaker, Obery Hendricks, Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros, Barbara A. Holmes, Joel Hunter, Kathy Khang, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Anne Lamott, James Martin, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Jeania Ree V. Moore, Otis Moss III, Ched Myers, Whitney Parnell, Eboo Patel, Myrna Pérez, Soong-Chan Rah, Richard Rohr, Alexia Salvatierra, Rob Schenck, Najeeba Syeed, Barbara Brown Taylor, Sharon E. Watkins, Cornel West, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Randy Woodley, Bill Wylie-Kellermann, Jenny Yang, Faith-Marie Zambé

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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Please send all business and editorial correspondence to Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002.

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

U.S.: \$39.95 one year print (for first-class mail, \$50). Digital subscriptions to Sojourners are available for \$19.95 at sojo.net/subscribe. **Australia:** \$78 one year (via air mail, paid in Australian currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 610, Unley 5061 SA). **New Zealand:** \$97 one year (via air mail, paid in New Zealand currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 9483, Wellington, NZ); email admin@mediacom.org.au. **Canada:** \$49.95 one year (paid in USD). **All other international** (six to eight weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. **Air service overseas** (two to three weeks delivery): \$69.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

NEWSSTAND CIRCULATION

Newsstand circulation through Disticor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@disticor.com.

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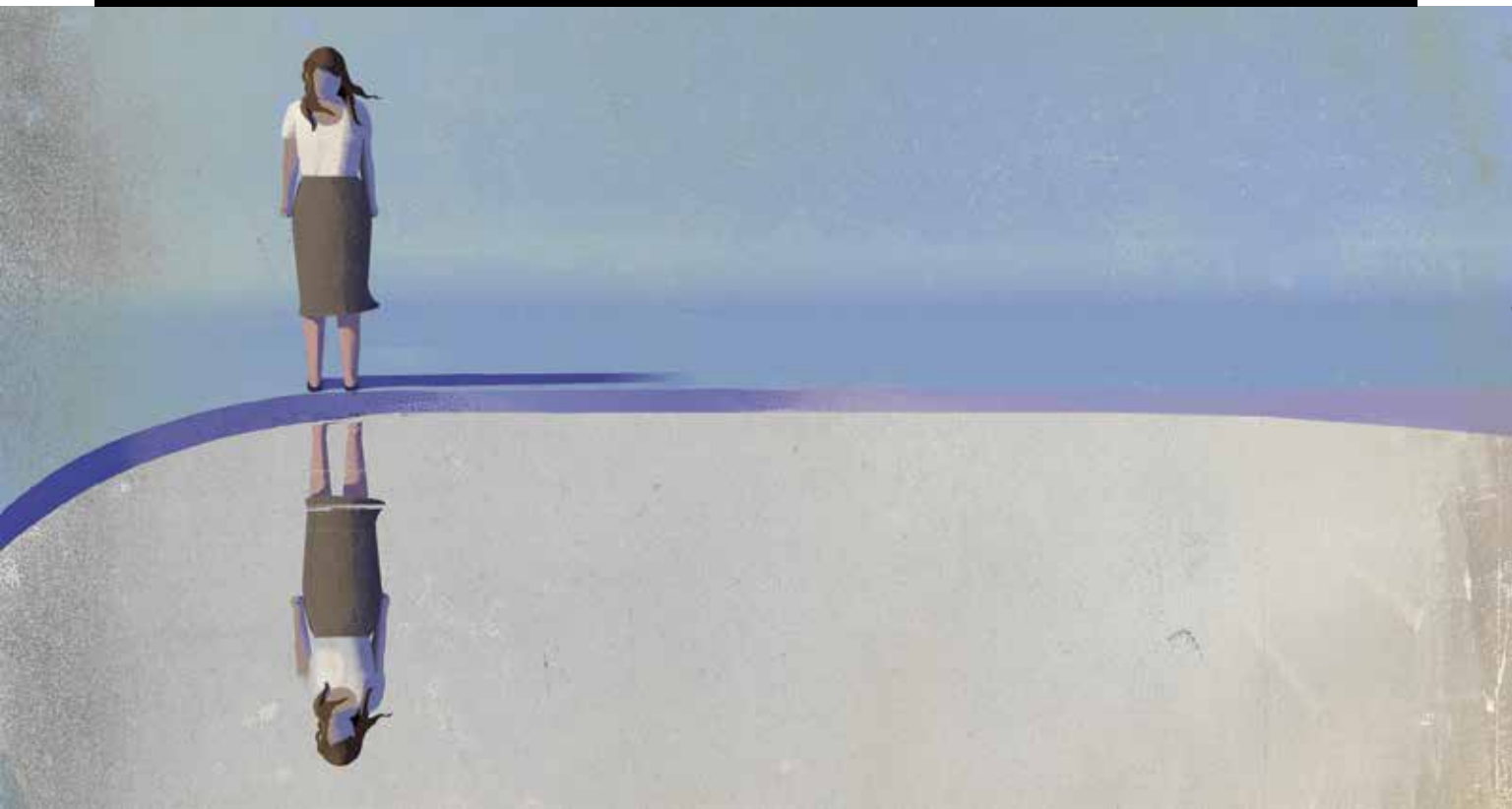
Number of 2020 presidential candidates who live on the same block as our office.

3:30 P.M.

The time each day our previous office would start smelling like fajitas from the Tex-Mex restaurant downstairs.

3

Accidental shut-offs of our office water supply this summer caused by our neighbor's construction.



1

MOBILIZING HOPE

BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR

CENTERING DOWN

Howard Thurman's seminal and seemingly timeless book *Jesus and the Disinherited*, published in 1949, should be required reading in every seminary—maybe even in every church.

Thurman served as a moral anchor of the civil rights movement. His career spanned the breadth of the movement, from his tenure as a professor of religion at Morehouse College and his service as dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University to pastoring the nation's first multiracial, interfaith church, The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, and becoming the first black dean of Boston University's chapel. A visionary religious leader and thinker, he was a guide

cont'd on next page

**"CONTEMPLATION
DOES NOT COME
EASILY TO MOST
ACTIVISTS."**

“THURMAN OFFERS A BALM TO HELP HEAL THE WOUNDED SOUL OF OUR NATION.”

cont'd from previous page and inspiration to Martin Luther King Jr., James Farmer, Marian Wright Edelman, Bayard Rustin, Jesse Jackson, and many others in the struggle for civil rights, justice, and freedom.

Thurman has also had a profound impact on my own faith journey, particularly in inspiring and sustaining my commitment to faith-rooted activism.

Jesus and the Disinherited was way ahead of its time, particularly in the way that it challenged conventional understandings of Christology by centering Jesus in his contextual identity as a poor Jewish man—a member of an oppressed and marginalized group whose back was against the wall. By extension, Jesus is in direct solidarity with every marginalized and disinherited group in human history. In many ways Jim Wallis' new book, *Christ in Crisis*, previewed in this issue, is a contemporary and desperately needed invitation, like Thurman's, to reclaim the Jesus of Nazareth whose life and teachings are meant to turn the world and its oppressive structures upside down.

In *Disinherited*, Thurman argues that neither fear, nor hate, nor hypocrisy—which he refers to as the three hounds of hell that track the disinherited

—can ever have dominion because of Christ's victory over death and injustice on the cross. These words offer an oasis of hope in the midst of these perilous times as the 2020 election increasingly becomes a referendum on hate, fear, and hypocrisy. Thurman offers a balm to help heal the wounded soul of our nation.

Thurman has profoundly shaped my understanding of the connection between contemplation and action and the importance of the inner life. Contemplation does not come easily or naturally to most activists. We are resistant to the inner life, in part because we are so absorbed with crises in the outer life. I often give my favorite collection of Thurman's devotions, titled *Meditations of the Heart*, as a graduation gift. The book speaks to the need for an inner life that helps to sustain and anchor our sense of calling, including in sustaining prophetic witness.

I ended my first book, *Mobilizing Hope*, with my favorite poem by Thurman, “How Good to Center Down!” He wrote: “How good it is to center down! To sit quietly and see one's self pass by! The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic; Our spirits resound with clashing, with noisy silences, While something deep within hungers and thirsts for the still moment and the resting lull.” Amid our frenetic and workaholic culture and the overload of information and demands on our time and attention, we could all be reminded of the urgent need to “center down.” ✕



Adam Russell Taylor is executive director of Sojourners.

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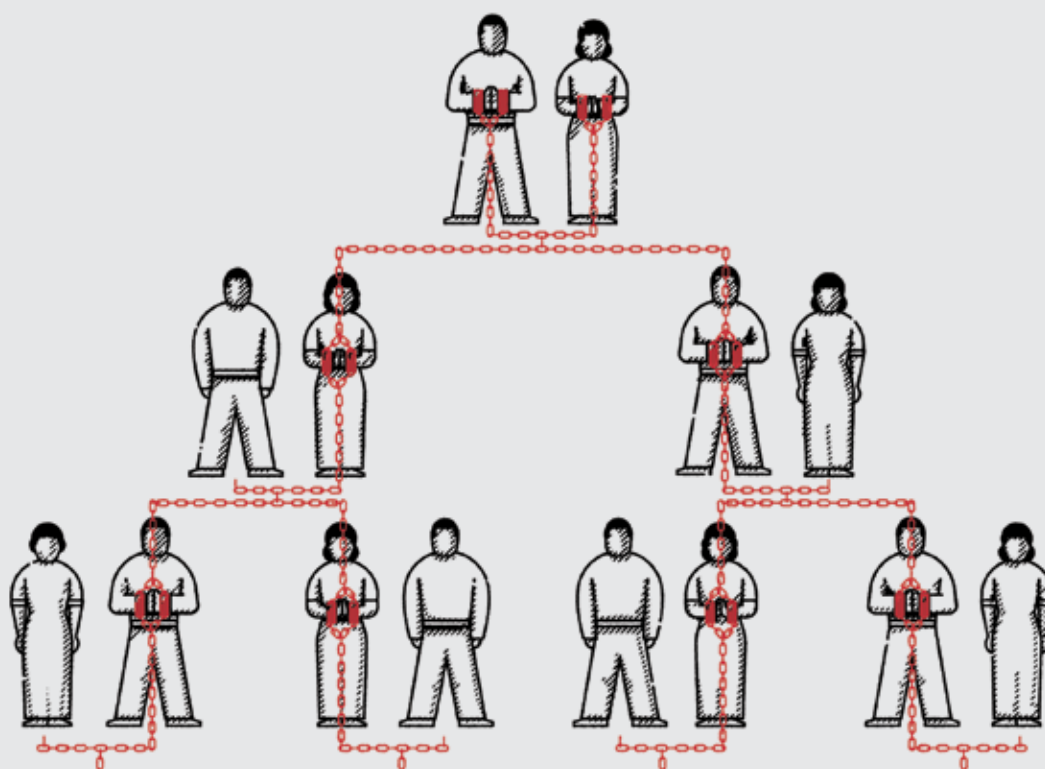
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GLADDENING LIGHT



WHAT KIND OF AMERICA DO YOU WANT?

If you're happy with the state of race relations now, don't do anything.



2

In May, delegates at the annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland voted unanimously to affirm the principle of reparations for the uncompensated labor of enslaved persons. In a diocese that is more than 90 percent white, there was not a single nay vote. How did this happen?

The issue of reparations is mired in emotion, often mischaracterized, and largely misunderstood. The economic, political, and moral dimensions are difficult to grasp. Some of us have an emotional response to the word, but when reparations are fully and fairly explained, Americans want to do the right thing.

Everyone living in our great nation has inherited a mess created by the institution of slavery. None of us caused this brokenness, but all of us have a moral responsibility to fix it.

For generations, the bodies of black people did not belong to themselves,

but were bred, used, and sold to attain wealth. Our nation prospered from this evil, race-based system of chattel slavery. Many of our institutions—including, sadly, the church—profited as well. However, a structure with a broken foundation cannot hope to stand. It must be repaired.

Reparation, quite simply, means to repair that which has been broken. An act of reparation is an attempt to restore, atone for, reconcile, and make amends for a wrong or injury. It is *not* only about monetary compensation. It is not the transfer of money from white people to black people. It is what *this* generation will do to repair the damage caused by previous generations.

As the prophet Isaiah said: “If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil ... [then] your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in” (58:9-12).

After the hard-fought abolition of slavery in our nation, reparations were denied for freed African-American people to compensate for their centuries of undeserved bondage, even though many white plantation owners received reparations for the losses they incurred from the Civil War and the end of slavery. As Ta-Nehisi Coates said in his congressional testimony, “enslavement ‘shaped every crucial aspect of the economy and politics’ of America, so that by 1836 more than \$600 million, almost half of the economic activity in the United States, derived directly or indirectly from the cotton produced by the million-odd slaves. By the time the enslaved were emancipated, they comprised the largest single asset in America.”

We can celebrate the strides made in racial attitudes in our country and be proud of the accomplishments of many black individuals who have overcome great odds. But for the millions of descendants of slaves trapped in a pernicious cycle of hopelessness, poverty, and rage due to their real experience of racial segregation, redlining, inferior schools, and the like, the widespread assumption that everyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps is a lie. They know that the odds are against them on many fronts: They cannot change their environment, and they cannot change the color of their dark skin.

**“AMERICA IS READY TO DO THIS
LONG-OVERDUE WORK.”**

The Bible mandates leaders to be held accountable for the fair and equal treatment of all who inhabit the land. However, we must acknowledge that there can be no love without justice, and there can be no justice without repairing injustice. I believe America is ready to do this long-overdue work.

Many of my white friends ask me: “What do black people want? Haven’t we done enough?” I want to turn the question around: “What do *you* want? What kind of America do *you* want to live in?” If you are happy with the state of race relations now, then don’t do anything. But if you want a reconciled nation, then a public conversation on reparations needs to happen. Congress and the American people need to support legislation to study proposals for monetary and nonmonetary reparations to the descendants of the victims of slavery. Today, making restitution is our generation’s task. ❖

Eugene Taylor Sutton is bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. This commentary is adapted from Sutton’s congressional testimony given in June in support of H.R. 40, a bill to establish a commission to develop proposals for reparations for African Americans.

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COMMENTARY

BY KELLY SHERMAN-CONROY



START BY SAYING HER NAME

Indigenous women break the silence.

Jessie Renae Waters (Oglala Sioux) was pregnant and found murdered April 30, 2015, near her home in Oglala, S.D. Her case remains unsolved to this day. Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind (Spirit Lake) was murdered Aug. 19, 2018, by a neighbor in Fargo, N.D. Her body was not found for eight days. Jessie and Savanna are someone's daughter, sister, grandchild.

The National Crime Information Center reported that in 2016 there were more than 5,700 reports of missing Indigenous women and girls, a rate much higher than that of other groups of women.

Ashley Loring Heavy Runner (Blackfeet) disappeared from Browning, Mont., located on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, on June 12, 2017. With little help from authorities, Heavy Runner's family found support from the Blackfeet United Methodist Parish in Browning. On Dec. 12, 2018, the family took Ashley's story to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. The parish helped with travel expenses, found additional support, and began advocating for Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).

Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Saint Paul, Minn., has advocated for MMIWG not only through prayer vigils, but also by hanging a red dress near the church's entrance as part of The REDress Project, Canadian artist Jamie Black's response to gendered and racialized violence against Native women.

These two churches are examples of faith communities that worked together to assess how they could position themselves to advocate and engage their communities about MMIWG. They've made a longstanding

commitment to their Indigenous ministries within their national church.

An evil has been unanswered and ignored for far too long. After decades of silence and oppression, Native women are speaking loudly for everyone to hear. There are many ways to advocate for women such as Amy Lynn Hanson (Navajo), found murdered in Red Rock, N.M., on Nov. 30, 2014—her case is still unsolved.

Thinking differently and using our words to create action requires us to take different positions on what we truly know. As Christians and advocates, we need to open up spaces for new ways of thinking and experiencing. Invite Indigenous women to tell the stories of the countless lost sisters. The roles we play together in the life of the church show how the Woniya (Holy Spirit) works in and around a community gathered to create healing through advocacy.

Our faith communities need leaders who will speak about hard topics and challenge the conscience of our communities. It is not always an easy task. But the murder of Angela Maynahonah Rodriguez (Comanche) cannot go unanswered. Seven years have passed since her body was found near Fox, Okla. Her case remains untouched.

My grandfather, Thomas Conroy Sr., taught me a lot about our Lakota Sioux tribal knowledge and worldview. Sioux values are based upon an accountability that is relational; this helps to bring forward what is most important, which then holds us accountable to *Mitákuye Oyás'íŋ* (all our relations). This Sioux value produces a style of advocacy that heals in a respectful and transcendent way.

Mitákuye Oyás'íŋ is the complete embodiment of the sacredness of Christian life. When we advocate for MMIWG, our communities can hear, see, and acknowledge that the deaths and disappearances of more than 5,700 women are not just statistics, but a severe epidemic.

My grandfather's understanding of community and the sacred connections we have allows us to act and be the way we were meant to be as children of God, both within the community and through our individual lives. Indigenous communities deserve healing and justice. When we weigh the cost of advocating for MMIWG, there is only one conclusion: It is worth the risk. Start by saying her name. ✦

Kelly Sherman-Conroy (Oglala Sioux) is minister at Nativity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.

T

LOOKING BACKWARD

The Pompeo commission is another Trump administration attempt to undermine human rights.

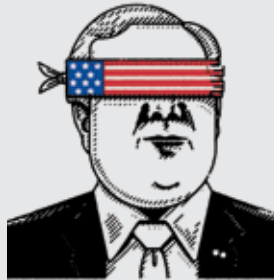
The 2018 state-sponsored execution of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist and *Washington Post* columnist, was a brazen violation of his right to life by a repressive regime, yet the U.S. executive branch responded with near indifference. Then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had already said that advancing U.S. interests should come before promoting U.S. values—such as defending human rights—and his successor Mike Pompeo has followed suit.

The Trump administration has disavowed the longstanding commitment to human rights by the U.S. in foreign policy. It has withdrawn from the U.N. Human Rights Council, ceded a voice on the U.N. body addressing racial oppression, and ignored the chorus of international condemnation of its family separation policy.

So when Pompeo announced the creation of a new State Department commission to revisit philosophical questions at the heart of the U.S. commitment to human rights, public outcry has been fierce, and rightfully so. Pompeo's Commission on Unalienable Rights, tasked with "fresh thinking about human rights discourse"—based on "our nation's founding principles of natural law and natural rights"—provoked objection from secular and religious advocates alike. The advisory body's mission, membership, and origin story all sparked concern, despite the proviso that it would speak to principles, not policy.

People of faith have further reason to oppose the commission: Its backward-looking terms of reference impose an unconscionable constraint on theological reflection about matters of justice.

The founding of the United States was not the last word on human rights—not for those who fought to abolish the blasphemous and bloody scourge of chattel slavery, eradicate the brutality of child labor,



or afford women a voice in our democracy. Every decisive social justice movement in the United States has involved a public theological contest in which the radically egalitarian theme of Christ's teaching eventually triumphed. That each liberation struggle is celebrated in the clear hindsight of history testifies to the expansion of God's reign through greater justice for an ever-widening circle of humanity.

The adoption of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights heralded a global recognition of universal human dignity. It safeguards equality more consistently and understands rights more expansively than does the U.S. Constitution. It endowed human rights with import apart from the nation-state, whose power was relativized in favor of the individual's sanctity. It is the framework that lets shared denunciation of Nazism and apartheid speak wisdom to contested contemporary struggles for gender and LGBTQ equality. A transnational coalition of Protestant and Catholic leaders, alongside Jewish and black freedom advocates, urged this historic achievement. The Christian worldviews of key contributors helped shape the Universal Declaration. Building on common ethical ground across religions and cultures, it gained unparalleled international adherence and effect.

Questions posed to the Pompeo commission are profound: "Why do we have human rights? Who or what grants them?" For Christians, these questions invite sacred conversations about human dignity rooted in God's love for each person, Christ's example of inclusive neighbor love, our status as divine image-bearers, and more. A deeper understanding of our faith-inspired commitments supports the cross-cultural dialogue on which a global system of human rights depends.

We must not submit such sacred conversations to a government office—least of all to one that has made power politics, not human rights, its priority. Nor should we accept 1776 as the ethical touchstone, and thus hinder the salutary movement of the spirit toward equality and liberation.

We must hold our leaders accountable to respecting the Universal Declaration. It reflects Christian ethical commitments far better than this new commission can. ♦

**"PUBLIC OUTCRY
HAS BEEN FIERCE,
AND RIGHTFULLY
SO."**

Allyson McKinney Timm, founder of Justice Revival, is a theologically trained human rights lawyer and elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

REVEALING OUR DIGNIFIED RAGE

3



"No" is a complete sentence. I said it recently to a U.S. Capitol Police officer when he asked me to stop praying the rosary for immigrant children and to move. He then arrested me for "crowding, obstructing, or incommoding" in the rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building in D.C.

That day the police arrested 71 Catholics. In the parlance of Christian nonviolence, we brought the spiritual power of our prayer to a site of mortal sin—specifically the offices of powerful lawmakers who support, through cowardly and often deliberate consent, caging immigrant children. The border patrol apprehended 69,157 such children at the U.S.-Mexico boundary between October 2018 and July 2019, seven of whom have died after being in federal custody.

What is the significance of Catholics and other Christians saying "no"? At its most authentic, religious faith builds moral muscles that push the human species to become more generous and just and guard against it backsliding into barbarity. While shallow religion shapes people for instinctive compliance to authority, ecclesial and secular, a deep faith tradition trains for moral discernment and formation of conscience and provides a narrative for how to resist immoral actions.

When the legitimate authority of the state implements immoral legis-

**"SHALLOW RELIGION
SHAPES PEOPLE
FOR COMPLIANCE."**

lation and tacitly supports inhuman practices on a broad scale (as the current administration is doing with immigration), it creates a moral dilemma in the citizenry. Is this practice right or wrong? When the lives of children are at risk or families feel threatened, then the moral tension created by the dilemma skyrockets. That tension seeks an outlet—sometimes in the form of a weapon.

For Catholics and people of many other faiths, the weapon of choice is a moral one, a nonviolent one. Children in cages is wrong. Actions that produced this result must be resisted. As Mexican sociologist Myriam Fracchia Figueiredo writes, “To disobey an inhuman order, that is, an order that exerts harm on another or on oneself, is a moral weapon, and the greatest challenge posed by nonviolent action.”

How can we make the moral tension observable to our opponents? In the Catholic tradition, the rosary is a beautiful, ancient prayer of “yes” to God. It also has long been a weapon of choice in wrestling with, correcting, and pushing toward the redemption of the powers and principalities. In the Russell Building rotunda, the Hail Marys and Our Fathers of a few hundred people echoed down marble corridors to Senate offices. We replaced the traditional scripture of the five Sorrowful Mysteries with excerpts of testimonies from more than 60 minors held in U.S. Border Patrol custody.

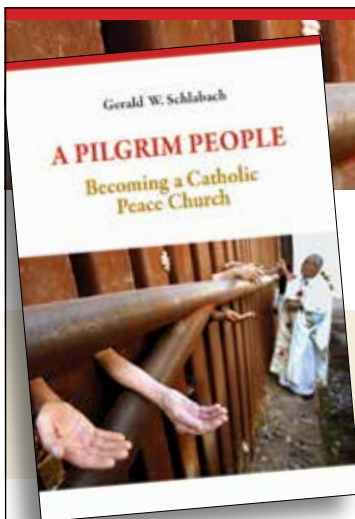
We brought pictures of incarcerated children to the place where senators research and prepare policy. We pierced the legislators’ protective bubble by appearing in their space and by humanizing the moral struggle. We revealed our “dignified rage.” We urged them to return to their moral duty and reminded them that their legitimacy relies on our consent.

A few days after my release, a neighbor introduced me to her grandson, recently arrived from El Salvador. I learned he had spent three months walking to the U.S. border and five weeks in detention facilities in Texas. He is 15 years old.

As people of authentic religious faith, we are inheritors of a great moral reserve. If we don’t use it when it is most needed, we lose it.

When an authority issues an inhuman order, ask what action your community can take to demonstrate dissent. Reply in a complete sentence. ❖

Rose Marie Berger is senior associate editor of *Sojourners* magazine, a Catholic poet, and author of *Bending the Arch*.



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FACE TO FACE

BY NAJEEBA SYEED

WHY INTERFAITH COALITIONS GET RESULTS



In my teaching, I seek to educate students toward a robust democracy. Religious education is so often engaged with abstract concepts such as “peace” and “justice” without considering how to put these ideas into daily action. What does religious pluralism in the real world look like? How do we prepare clergy and community to face the urgent issues of our time, which are sometimes caused by religion? How can interfaith solidarity deepen solutions and build durable partnerships that will benefit all creation, especially in times of state violence?

The starting point of many theologies of religious pluralism is the notion of salvation and how a particular tradition views the “afterlife.” This paradigm, not surprising, is often future-oriented; it is hard to translate into behaviors that are inclusive not just at the belief level but also in the lived religion of individuals, communities, and institutions.

We often approach interreligious education as if each community teaches its own members in isolation from other religious traditions. I want to propose a new paradigm: Even if no one in our classroom or congregation is from another religious tradition, what we teach will forever imprint upon them how to engage religious diversity.

“RELIGIOUS PLURALISM ACROSS JUSTICE ISSUES CAN DEEPEN SOLUTIONS AND BUILD DURABLE PARTNERSHIPS.”

What is your tradition teaching members about the social and political value of religious pluralism? Is it inclusive? Exclusive? How do we apply these categories to build curricula that are not only reflective of religious literacy of the other, but also provide religious reasoning for why the other should be protected (or not) by the state?

For example, in my classroom I teach case studies that include persecution of a religious minority by the state. We look at U.S. migration policies during the Holocaust, when many Jews were denied entry. What is the responsibility of your religious community to stand up against the state when an action of the government could save a whole group, whether or not they are of your own background? My students then extrapolate from this example to our current-day situation of migration. They talk about how they would build not just single-faith coalitions to stand up to governmental violence—but also about the work it would take, theologically and practically, to do it as a larger group of faith-driven activists of various traditions.

We know that interfaith coalitions are extremely effective in building such accountability procedures. A year ago, a local federal elected official refused to meet with DACA recipients in his district. We visited his office as an interfaith coalition, accompanying the constituents. When his staff saw Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu clergy, they recognized that the whole community was in support of a meeting and politely scheduled one.

In a time when excesses of the state in many ways harm all communities, inclusive democracy is under threat. Educating for religious pluralism is the responsibility of all of us—and we all benefit from it. ♦

Najeeba Syeed has been recognized for her work in interfaith peacebuilding, restorative justice, and religious leadership in Muslim contexts. She is co-editor of a forthcoming volume on interreligious learning and theological education.



THERE IS HEALING IN THE WATER

Over two months, I've been on three pilgrimages through stories of oppression in the U.S., water figuring prominently in each. Leaving the Whitney Plantation and rolling through nearby Louisiana bayous, I imagined African-descended men and women masking themselves in troubled waters from slave catchers. Rolling through the desert between San Antonio and McAllen, Texas, I imagined people of Spanish, African, Aztec, Mayan, and Incan origin scouring barren land in search of water, and flourishing.

Then I spent a week with my friend Ruth Anna Buffalo and her family and friends. Ruth is an enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation and the first Native American Democratic woman elected to the North Dakota legislature. Early in our time together, Ruth shared the story of her tribe's movement north, from present-day Standing Rock. The Mandan settled in the bottomlands of Elbowoods.

From 1949 to 1956, the U.S. Department of the Interior built the Garrison Dam and intentionally flooded the treaty-bound lands of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, along with more than 20 other tribes, to save white communities experiencing natural flooding downriver. They named the human-made reservoir Lake Sakakawea. Elbowoods—the land where Ruth's family flourished—is

now under the water. And whites have claimed the “lakefront” property.

I drove, walked, and stood alongside Ruth for seven days. Three times we walked next to Lake Sakakawea in protest of and prayer for missing and murdered Indigenous women. Once, we carried a bucket of water and an eagle-feather staff along the Red River near Harwood, N.D. Hanging from the staff were 134 strips of red cloth carrying the names of 134 women found dead in the Red River over several decades. We walked in silence for two miles as part of a 550-mile walk of mourning organized by Sharon M. Day, a founder of the Indigenous Peoples Task Force. We walked twice more across and along the banks of Lake Sakakawea on the other side of the state, where Olivia Lone Bear was found submerged in a friend's truck just half a mile from her house, nine months after she went missing in 2017.

Surrounded by oil drills, fracking flares, and “man camps,” the women and girls of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation are vulnerable. Across the U.S., Indigenous women are most likely to be preyed upon in urban centers by non-Native men. The Urban Indian Health Institute, responding to the dearth of research on these attacks—despite the fact that almost three-fourths of Indigenous people in the U.S. live in urban areas—recently issued an in-depth study of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in 71 cities and found that 56 percent were murder cases.

We stood on the bank of Lake Sakakawea, named for the woman who guided Lewis and Clark through this territory. We offered tobacco to the water that had encircled Olivia and held her and revealed her body after her terror.

I wept at the water's edge.

The water is alive. It has memory.

There is healing in the water. ❧

**“WE STOOD ON THE
BANK OF LAKE
SAKAKAWEA. THE
WATER IS ALIVE. IT
HAS MEMORY.”**

Lisa Sharon Harper is president of FreedomRoad.us and the author of several books, including the forthcoming *Fortune*, the story of her family and a call for reparations.

EYEWITNESS

4



“OUR OLDEST CLIENT
WAS 78. ALL RACES,
ALL TAX BRACKETS,
IT DOESN'T MATTER.”

RECOVERY IN THE OVERDOSE CAPITAL

“Within 72 hours after an overdose, the Quick Response Team—me, a faith leader, a counselor or peer coach, and a police officer—will go out to that individual, either where they overdosed or where they reside. We introduce ourselves and tell them they are not in trouble—we are not here for that. Then we ask if they’ve thought about recovery. If they have, we’ll lay out all the options and let them decide for themselves what they want to do.

We have been to homes that are a quarter of a million dollars all the way to abandoned homes that have no floors because they’re rotted out. Our oldest client was 78. All races, all tax brackets, it doesn’t matter.

The pastors aren’t there just to pray for somebody, but for any spiritual support. We do have a lot of clients who were brought up in the church who feel they’re not valued or that they’ve fallen away from God. Whatever they are feeling spiritually, the faith leader will be there to lift them up.

Huntington, at one point, was known as the overdose capital of the U.S. But today we are also the recovery capital as well. Around town you’ll see billboards for medication-assisted treatment. If you walk into the health department’s harm reduction program, you’ll see people who are in throes of addiction, but you’ll also see peer counselors, STD testing, and Narcan training. You’ll see both addiction and recovery, I will not sugarcoat that, but we’re slowly trying to let the recovery side take over.” ♦

Larrecsa Cox is a paramedic and leader of the Quick Response Team in Huntington, W.Va. She spoke with *Sojourners* associate editor Betsy Shirley about helping people with opioid addiction find recovery.

MY WORLDVIEW HAS ALWAYS BEEN MOST
CHANGED BY TWO THINGS: BEING IN PLACES
I WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE, AND MEETING
PEOPLE I WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW.

BY JIM WALLIS

22

WHO IS MY NEIGH

OWI-16535-E



Police were called to Detroit's Sojourner Truth federal housing project in 1942 after white residents attempted to prevent African Americans from moving in.

BORE?

BUT WANTING TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF,
HE ASKED JESUS, "AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?"
—LUKE 10:29

A

young lawyer asks Jesus what he must do “to inherit eternal life.” To which Jesus gives a simple answer: Love God and love your neighbor. There you have it, says Jesus. But the inquisitor asks Jesus a follow-up question: “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25–37). ✖ It’s clear from the context that this lawyer was seeking to diminish or limit the scope of who counted as his neighbor. The tone isn’t one of expanding the reach of loving his neighbor but of restricting it. ✖ Jesus answers with the exemplary story of the Good Samaritan in a way that upends expectations and gets to the heart of the question. The lesson of Jesus’ parable is much deeper than the traditional understanding of the Good Samaritan—that Jesus is simply commending the act of reaching out to another in need, as the Samaritan does, as opposed to the priest and Levite in Jesus’ story who famously passed by the man because they were too busy or preoccupied or afraid of being late to an important religious meeting.

“IF YOU’RE EVER LOST AND SEE A POLICEMAN, HIDE BEHIND A BUILDING.”

But what Jesus is trying to teach us here goes much deeper than simple compassion and service to the needy. The Samaritans were not “good,” as far as the Judeans of Jesus’ day were concerned. They were a despised mixed race, considered half-breeds and foreigners by the Jews. They usually provoked disgust, not admiration. But Jesus chooses the hated “other” as his example of who our neighbor is. Jesus then describes the Samaritan taking actions that show us what it means to be a neighbor as the Samaritan reaches out to someone who was an “other” to him with practical assistance, self-sacrifice, and risk on the dangerous highway of the Jericho Road.

Martin Luther King Jr., in the final sermon of his life, the day before he was assassinated, talked about the dangers of the Jericho Road: “It’s a winding, meandering road. It’s really conducive for ambushing,” King said. “And so the first question that ... the Levite asked was, ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But then the Good Samaritan came by and he reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan was meant not just to call people to service and self-sacrifice, but also to disrupt and challenge their concept of who their neighbors were and were not. It was a direct attack on tribalism, both that of his fellow Jews and of all of us, and a proclamation that those who choose to join Jesus’ tribe would be known for reaching out to and standing with all the other tribes. According to Jesus, the test of who your neighbor is will be shown by how you treat someone who is *different* from you. I believe that when Jesus’ lesson becomes the measure of who our neighbors are and how we treat them, this story can change cultures and even politics.

GETTING OUTSIDE OUR PATH

Theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez put it this way: “Who is my neighbor? The neighbor was the Samaritan who *approached* the wounded man and *made him his neighbor*. The neighbor ... is not he whom I find in my path, but rather he in whose path I place myself, he whom I approach and actively seek.”

Who is in our daily path and who is not? That is part of the problem—we are limited in loving our neighbor by our narrow pathways of the “neighbors” around us, our people, those we consider “us.” Jesus is saying we have to go outside the boundaries of our normal path to find the people who are the ultimate test of the question “who is my neighbor?” The neighbor we need most to reach out to will only be found if we actively seek them out, by deliberately placing ourselves in different pathways than those that are normal to us and our people. The clear call of Jesus to love the neighbors outside our path is seriously challenged and regularly compromised by our racial geography—a



A sign put up by white residents outside Detroit's Sojourner Truth federal housing project in 1942.

geography that is not put in place by accident, but by public policy and deliberate strategy, and which prevents people from finding their “neighbors.”

Given the residential, economic, racial, and religious segregation that defines where most of our lives tread, we can't really do what Jesus says until we disrupt our normal pathways by moving outside of them. We need to ask ourselves whether we are willing to transgress those boundaries—the ones that make it impossible to follow Jesus' answer to the question “who is my neighbor?”

Let me give you a personal example. My father, Jim Wallis Sr., was an officer in World War II, sent out to the Pacific after graduating from college, getting married, and being commissioned as an officer in the Navy on one very busy day. After the war, most returning veterans, like my dad, came home to an enormous opportunity. Our young family, like many others, received two huge things: the GI Bill for education and an FHA loan for a house. When you get a free education and the chance to afford your first home, you immediately become middle class—and that's what our government did for us. We moved onto a nice street called River Park

in a lovely neighborhood in the Detroit area called Redford Township, with almost every home a three-bedroom ranch house headed by a World War II veteran. My siblings and I were able to walk easily and safely to the wonderful nearby elementary school.

Everyone in our neighborhood, school, and nearby church looked just like us. Black World War II veterans, like the black sailors aboard my dad's destroyer, almost never got the GI Bill or an FHA loan. Jim Crow laws prevented that in the South, and segregated education and banking policies did so in the North. No Detroit banks would lend money to black families for a new home, and the schools their kids went to, not surprisingly, were not nearly as good as our school. But we never thought about it or talked about it. In the white community, no one did. We were all on the same path.

EYE-OPENING MOMENTS

As a teenager, I started to ask some questions about all that, about why people seemed to live very differently and separately in white and black Detroit. The hard questions weren't welcome and were never honestly answered

in my all-white world. If I really wanted to find the answers, I realized, I would need to step outside of the boundaries of my path and ask the same questions elsewhere.

My questions took me into the city of Detroit, where I worked low-paying summer jobs alongside other young men my age—but they were black, and I was white, and I began to realize that was what made all the difference. While we were all born in Detroit, we had been raised in different countries. I was making money for college and they were supporting their families. I also sought out black churches, which I had never been to, nor had black Christians from those churches come to ours.

There were many moments that became great eye-openers for me, moments that in the faith community are sometimes called “epiphanies.” One involved my friend Butch, a fellow janitor in a downtown office building who brought me home for dinner one night to meet his family. I will never forget what his mother said to me about the Detroit police: “I tell my children, if you're ever lost and can't find your way home, and you see a policeman, hide behind a building or duck under a stairwell; wait until he passes and then find your

way home.” As she spoke, the words my mother told her five kids echoed in my head: “If you are ever lost and can’t find your way back home, *look for a policeman*; he is your friend and will hold you by the hand and bring you home safely.” That story from 50 years ago is, of course, still painfully real these days. The reason I believe stories from black parents today is that I found a place, outside my path, where I heard those stories a long time ago.

Changing my pathway and the places I go has continually changed my life—over and over again. My worldview has always been most changed by two things: being in places I was not supposed to be and meeting people I was not supposed to know, much less become “neighbors” with.

This is what Jesus meant when he said to love our neighbor—to get outside of our tribal pathways and listen to the lives of those whose pathways have been so different from ours. They are the test of loving our neighbor. That biblical and spiritual reality has never been truer in my lifetime than it is right now. We need to reclaim Jesus’ message by seeking and finding our true neighbors, if our faith is going to have any integrity or our democracy any health.

THE TWO GREAT LOVES

When asked by the religious leaders of his day, What is the greatest commandment? Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40). Loving God and loving your neighbor sums up both religion and law; everything starts with and goes back to these two great loves.

These vital questions must not be reduced to political and partisan issues between left and right, liberals and conservatives. They must become matters of faith that can bring us together across political boundaries. Jesus meant that our “neighbors can come from surprising places,” wrote New Testament commentator Darrell L. Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary.

Peter Wehner, a conservative evangelical and Republican strategist, compared the actions of President Trump with the teachings of Jesus. “Trumpism is not a political philosophy,” Wehner wrote, “it is a purposeful effort, led by a demagogue, to incite ugly passions, stoke resentments and divisions, and create fear of those who are not like ‘us’—Mexicans, Muslims, and Syrian refugees. But it will not end there. There will always be fresh targets.”

Wehner contrasts that with the principles of Jesus, saying, “[A] carpenter from Nazareth offered a very different philosophy. When you see a wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, Jesus taught, you should not pass him by. ‘Truly I say to you,’ he said in Matthew, ‘to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me.’ ... At its core, Christianity teaches that everyone, no matter at what station or in what season in life, has inherent dignity and worth.”

Jesus says, “Go and do likewise.” His point is simply to be a neighbor. To love God means to show mercy to those in need. An authentic life is found in serving God and caring for others. This is a central tenet of discipleship. Here, human beings fulfill their created role—to love God and be a neighbor to others by meeting their needs. Neighbors are not determined by race, creed, or gender; neighbors consist of anyone in need, all whom are made in the image of God.

New Testament theologian Sharon H. Ringe, in her commentary on Luke, emphasizes that the requirements of loving one’s neighbor include being active: “No one can

DEEP LISTENING TO OUR NEIGHBORS TO WHOM WE HAVE BEEN INDIFFERENT MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE FOR WHITE CHRISTIANS IN THE DAYS TO COME.

Top: Children in front of a half-mile-long concrete wall built in 1941 to separate African Americans from a white housing development in Detroit.

Bottom: A family outside their home in Detroit’s Sojourner Truth federal housing project.





simply *have* a neighbor; one must also *be* a neighbor. ... The story simply stands as yet another challenge to the transformation of daily life and business as usual, which lies at the heart of the practice of discipleship.” And that means to cross boundaries.

HUNGER FOR A DEEPER CONVERSATION

The opposite of loving your neighbor is not always hating them, but just being indifferent to them. Perhaps it is indifference to our neighbors that allows our willingness to ignore their lives, their needs, and even their children. If we are to be honest, we must admit that white privilege, and privilege of any kind, allows this indifference. It has been striking to me as I travel the country how oblivious many white people are to their own privilege. When you are used to white privilege, racial equality feels like a threat. Or as one young black man at a forum said, “If you can’t see white privilege, you have it.”

But the hopeful thing I have found is that many are hungry for a deeper conversation about what and who our neighbors are—with concrete action as a result. For example, I have always been struck by how conversations between mothers about their hopes, fears, and dreams for their children are such bonding experiences (for dads too, but even more for moms). But when those conversations are not occurring across lines of difference such as race, religion, immigration status, and others, it is such a lost opportunity for learning how to be neighbors together. That kind of deep listening to our neighbors to whom we have been indifferent may be the most important spiritual discipline for us Christians, especially white Christians, going forward.

When we realize that the very heart of all religion and law is “Love God, love your neighbor”—particularly the ones who are different from you—it can transform our lives, our communities, and our world. ✕

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine. This article is adapted from his forthcoming book, *Christ in Crisis: Why We Need to Reclaim Jesus* (HarperOne, 2019).



T H E P

O F

H U M I



BY PEARL MARIA BARROS

"We will make you humble," the superior in the Catholic order told me. I was 18 years old and had just joined a community of Catholic women religious.

We were eating dinner, and I was excitedly telling her and the other sisters what I had learned in theology class. A sister asked me, "Do you want to be a theologian?" With-

out hesitation, I answered "yes." She shot a quizzical look at the superior, who said, "Being a theologian is likely to make you proud and arrogant. Don't worry—we will make you humble." She and the others smiled knowingly. Confused and hurt, I shut up.

Becoming a theologian was not something that I wanted to do for prestige. It was

what I felt called to do; it was, and is, my vocation. As is usually the case in stories like this one, not all the sisters agreed with the superior's comment.

Later that evening, one of the older sisters approached me as I was studying in the convent library. She put her hand on my shoulder and said, "Little sister, do you know what

O W E R



**REAL HUMILITY IS THE
TRUTH. FALSE HUMILITY
CHEWS AWAY AT THE
ROOT OF JUSTICE.**

L I T Y

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATIONS BY ISRAEL G. VARGAS

humility is?" Before I could reply, she said, "Humility is the truth." Then she pointed at my books and notes. "The truth is that you love to study, question, think, and write. The truth is that these are the gifts God has given you. So be humble: Accept them and do something with them for the greater good."

My life has taken me far from that con-

vent library, but I've never forgotten her words because they freed me. After all, isn't that what truth does? It sets us free. But free from what?

HUMILITY IS NOT HUMILIATION

Keepers of Christian tradition have often

fed a lie to women and other members of historically marginalized communities that exercising the virtue of humility ("being humble") means keeping our heads down and our mouths shut. But this is false humility.

False humility functions to protect the status quo. It slyly whispers to us: "Don't

rock the boat,” “It’s not your problem,” or even worse, “It’s just the way it is.” False humility tells us to accept sexism, racism, and other social evils as part of the “cross” we or others must bear. False humility chews away at the root of justice, which is truth.

Humility—*real* humility—is the truth. Authentic humility enables us to see and acknowledge the truth of a person or situation, including ourselves. We cultivate humility as a personal virtue by first engaging in critical self-reflection, acknowledging our strengths as well as the places where we need to grow.

How do we too perpetuate the lies of false humility? What are the sites of privilege we occupy that need to be examined? Lest we get stuck in shame and guilt, humility reminds us that, in Christian tradition, no one is innocent. We are all called “to go our way and sin no more.” We are all invited to use our gifts and our privilege for the work of justice. In this way, humility can also be a collective virtue. It can lead us toward the common good. Humility can set us all free.

OWNING TRUTH OR PICKING UP STONES?

It is fitting that Jesus’ comment “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32) comes in response to consistent questions regarding his identity. Jesus has engaged in critical self-reflection; he knows who he is and who has sent him. He is not seduced by the lies of false humility.

John 8 begins with the story of the woman “caught in adultery.” It’s early morning at the temple and the crowds have gathered around Jesus to hear him teach. “The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery” (verse 3). They forced her to stand before the whole crowd. To test Jesus and trick him into some actionable offense, they said: “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (verses 4-5).

Jesus doesn’t take the bait. Instead, he bends down and writes on the ground. They persist in questioning him. Finally, Jesus answers them: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (verse 7). *Not* the answer they were looking for, not the answer they had been taught, but this is the answer that Jesus gives them—and gives us.

After the accusers skulk away one by one, Jesus engages this unnamed woman in conversation. As a feminist theologian, I find this interaction striking. He is the only one in the story who asks to hear her voice. “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” he asks. “No one, sir,” she replies. Jesus says, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (verses 10-11).

Jesus does not shame her; he does not *humiliate* her. Jesus knows the difference between *humility* and *humiliation*.

While humiliation leaves us wallowing in shame, humility promises that we are still redeemable. In the case of the woman caught in adultery, the truth of the situation is that it is unjust: Where is the man with whom this woman was “caught in the very act of committing adultery”? Why is he not being condemned to die? (Hint: sexism.) Further, how do we know whether this woman was engaging in a consensual sexual act or was being assaulted?

The religious leaders who bring her before Jesus presume she is guilty, but Jesus is not so quick to judge. Instead he speaks truth: Who among us has no sin? Who among us does not long for forgiveness, rather than condemnation? He acknowledges sin but he doesn’t see this sin as irredeemable. Jesus believes that we are capable of change.

These are the truths that make us humble; these are the truths that set us free.

Throughout John 8, Jesus defies expectations. He bluntly tells those who try to define him that they don’t know him—and they don’t know the God he calls “Father” (verses 12-20). Like its opening story of the woman caught in adultery, the chapter ends with folks ready to throw stones, though this time (verse 59) they pick up stones to throw at Jesus!

CAN WE EXERCISE COLLECTIVE HUMILITY?

Being humble, being truthful, does not make us popular. It is revolutionary, and it can be very dangerous. What must we risk to be humble? What are



current injustices that might be remedied by humility?

For example, news reports have focused on the inhumane conditions faced by women, children, and men who have recently crossed the U.S.-Mexico border seeking political asylum. After families are separated from each other, individuals are placed in “camps” with unsanitary conditions, including children kept in cages. There are reports of rampant sexual abuse of adults and minors. Children separated from their parents can be heard weeping inconsolably. Some children have died because of maltreatment.

While many in the U.S. and around the world protest these injustices, President Trump and others argue that immigrants should stay in their own countries and follow the proper protocol for immigrating to the United States. Television shows pit “liberal” Democrats against “conservative” Republicans only to have the “conversation” on immigration laws devolve into immature name-calling and silent stonewalling. How might the virtue of humility, of truth, remedy this situation?

Perhaps those who call themselves “Americans,” regardless of political affiliation, might officially acknowledge our collective and complicated national history. We could start by recognizing these truths: The United States is a nation built on the genocide of Indigenous peoples and through the labor of enslaved Africans and African Americans. Historically, we have already engaged in the heinous practice of separating families. African-American children were ripped from their parents and sold into slavery. Indigenous children were forced into government-run boarding schools, whose mission was to eradicate the “Indian” in them. What, if anything, have we learned from these experiences?

Although difficult, acknowledging these painful truths might help us embrace and exercise a collective humility.

MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS REJECTS DUALISM

The work of Chicana theorist and activist Gloria Anzaldúa provides examples of collective humility. In a process of collective acknowledgment, we might understand that there is no “us” and “them.” Instead, there is *nos/otras*.

Anzaldúa uses the term “*nos/otras*” to recognize that “the other” (*otras*) is always already a part of “us” (*nos*) and we are always already a part of them. It’s a term that shifts our subjectivity.

Anzaldúa is best known for her theorization of borderlands, which refers to the actual U.S.-Mexico border as well as a type of consciousness. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*,

WE ARE INVITED TO USE OUR GIFTS AND PRIVILEGE FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

Anzaldúa writes, “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. ... The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* [the crossers] live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal.’”

For Anzaldúa, the violence of the borderlands is foremost the violence of dualism. Dualism, in her understanding of it, privileges one identity category, one life, one group, over an “other.” It’s an “us vs. them” mentality that, she argues, is the root of all violence.

The paradox of the borderlands is that while it threatens to tear one apart, it simultaneously teaches one to recognize the inadequacy of dualistic categories. Transformation, Anzaldúa believes, can come through the development of a “borderlands (or *mestiza*) consciousness”—a form of consciousness that resists dualistic ways of thinking and being.

Although her initial theory of borderlands consciousness drew explicitly on the experiences of people who share *mestizaje* as a racial and ethnic heritage (the “mixing” of Spanish and Indigenous people), Anzaldúa’s later writings expanded borderlands consciousness to include all people who find themselves trapped between conflicting markers of identity.

She writes, “Our goal is not to use differences to separate us from others, but neither is it to gloss over them. Many of us identify with groups and social positions not limited to our ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, or national classifications. Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include.”

A borderlands consciousness can enable humility because it seeks truth. First, it calls *nos/otras* to engage in critical self-reflection. We must ask ourselves: What are our strengths? What are our shadows? How are they interwoven? Second, it asks us to acknowledge our suffering and the suffering of others: the pain of *nos/otras*. We ask: How am I contributing to this? How am I healing it?

Eventually, we learn to “define who we are by what we include.” We begin to see ourselves in the people and things we once believed were outside of us: the sister who vows to make us humble; the woman caught in adultery; the child crying in a cage; the guard at a border camp.

It is much easier to exclude the other, to say that the law of Moses or the law of the land instructs us to condemn them. It takes courage to say, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.” And to realize that what we have learned to hate is also within us. But this truth sets *nos/otras* free to go and sin no more. It reminds *nos/otras* that we are capable of change. ✨

Pearl Maria Barros is an assistant professor of religious studies at Santa Clara University in California.

~~DEAR CHURCH FAMILY,~~

~~WE HAVE BEEN WORKING AND PRAYING HARD THIS PAST WEEK AS WE'VE SEEN ALLEGED INCIDENTS INVOLVING OUR CHURCH REPORTED IN THE MEDIA. MUCH OF THIS REPORTING IS INACCURATE, BASED ON STATEMENTS MADE BY SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED IN A COORDINATED EFFORT TO UNDERMINE THIS CHURCH.~~

~~IT DOES APPEAR, HOWEVER, THAT IN CERTAIN SETTINGS, THOSE IN LEADERSHIP AT TIMES BEHAVED IN WAYS THAT ARE NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR BELIEFS AND VALUES. THOUGH THIS BEHAVIOR WAS NOT INTENDED TO CAUSE HARM, WE REGRET HOW THOSE INVOLVED DID NOT TAKE MORE CARE TO AVOID PLACING THEMSELVES IN COMPROMISING SITUATIONS. FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FELT HURT BY THIS SITUATION WE APOLOGIZE.~~

~~BUT LET US BE CLEAR. THERE IS NO ROOM FOR SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AMONG FOLLOWERS OF JESUS. SEVERAL YEARS AGO, WHEN THESE ALLEGATIONS WERE BROUGHT TO OUR ATTENTION, WE INVESTIGATED THE MATTER THOROUGHLY AND NO EVIDENCE OF ABUSE WAS FOUND. IF SUCH BEHAVIOR HAD BEEN DISCOVERED, WE WOULD HAVE ACTED APPROPRIATELY.~~

~~WE KNOW THIS PROCESS HAS BEEN PAINFUL AND WE ARE HURTING TOO. GOD HAS DONE SO MUCH THROUGH THIS CHURCH OVER THE YEARS AND WE ARE FRUSTRATED TO SEE THAT WITNESS CALLED INTO QUESTION. LIKE YOU, WE WANT THIS CHURCH TO THRIVE IN THE WORK GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO AND WE ARE CONFIDENT GOD WILL USE ALL THINGS TO HIS GLORY.~~

~~SINCERELY,~~

~~THE ELDERS~~

**Wade Mullen is uncovering the strategies that perpetrators—and their churches—
use to silence victims and enable abuse. By D.L. Mayfield**



PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLIN LENTON

In the past two years, prominent pastors and church leaders—including Willow Creek’s Bill Hybels, the Village Church’s Matt Chandler, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s Paige Patterson—have been accused of perpetrating or enabling abuse within their large institutions. By the time this story goes to print, another once-trusted person or institution will likely be proven to be corrupt, unreliable, and abusive.

While he was a youth pastor, Wade Mullen heard many of these hard stories from the teens and families he served. But when Mullen reported this abuse to his supervisor in accordance with state protocols, he was shocked when the church leadership dismissed it out of fear for what could happen to the institution. “Do you realize what reporting could do to that family? To this church?” asked a pastor. “These kids could take us all down with their storytelling.”

Despite this resistance from church leadership, Mullen reported the abuse to the appropriate civil authorities. After working for months to make clear why following reporting protocols was important for the safety of the vulnerable, he eventually resigned from the church.

The experience spurred Mullen to pursue a doctorate in organizational leadership, with a dissertation that examined how organizations respond to events that threaten their image. In his research, he told *Sojourners*, he “collected and analyzed nearly 300 media reports of American pastors of evangelical churches charged with a crime in the years 2016 and 2017.” Mullen, who now runs the M.Div. program at Lancaster Bible College’s graduate school, was profoundly affected. “I was stunned to discover that more than 200 were sex crimes, the vast majority of which were committed against children,” he said. “I was filled with grief and anger as I read descriptions of child sexual abuse, rape, child pornography, sex trafficking, and prostitution committed by those in positions of trust.”

In other words, Mullen became an expert on the very questions many of us have been asking lately: How do these systems end up enabling perpetrators while silencing victims? And—more importantly—how do so many of us *let* it happen, especially within the church?

BAD IMPRESSIONS

Mullen was drawn to Christian ministry in high school; in college he studied the Bible and earned awards like “most promising preacher.” He thought traditional ministry would give his life purpose. “I was getting sucked into what I now describe as this obsession that people in ministry so often develop with the work of the ministry and finding their value in that work,” Mullen told *Sojourners*. He became the assistant of high-profile



Christian speaker Josh McDowell, touring the world with him. “I was exposed to a lot of good work but also a lot of celebrity culture. I had one person tell me ‘this is the top’ of Christianity, and I almost got sucked into that. But at some point, I realized that this wasn’t what I wanted to do,” said Mullen. “A prominent person told me: ‘You are walking away from the opportunity of a lifetime and you will never get this opportunity again.’”

Mullen left and became a youth pastor. At the time he thought youth ministry was where he could use his gifts for the good of God’s reign. But today he sees it differently.

“For the next 10 years I worked in pastoral ministry among oppressive individuals and organizations,” Mullen said. “I didn’t see the oppression at first. Like most abuse, it was hidden until people started sharing their stories. Over the course of my time in ministry, I sat with victims of sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse as they recounted excruciating and soul-crushing pain caused by their perpetrators.”

“What I didn’t expect was that I would become a target of abusive power myself once I chose to advocate for victims, to report crimes, and to call for accountability and change.” Mullen persisted “for two long years.” But the situation worsened, and Mullen resigned, immediately losing his paycheck and his church-funded housing. His family—he and his wife had two kids—was effectively homeless. A few weeks later they found out they were expecting their third child.

Mullen channeled his devastation into studying the causes of the behavior he had just experienced. “As I researched crisis literature, I found something called impression management strategies,” he said. “I discovered this is exactly it: This is how abusers seduce, and how people who cover up abusers get away with that. So I kept following that

thread within evangelicalism.”

Coined by sociologist Erving Goffman in his 1956 book *The Presentation of Self in Every Day Life*, impression management strategies are conscious (or unconscious) efforts to influence the perception of others around a person, event, or institution. Goffman said that each of us has front-stage and backstage aspects of our lives, parts we highlight and parts we keep more hidden for various reasons. When celebrities announce a divorce by saying they are choosing a “conscious uncoupling,” it is an example of impression management strategies at work.

And though most communication departments and public relations professionals use some form of these strategies, they can have a sinister side. As Mullen told me: “Impression management becomes a problem when it is deceptively used to hide truths that ought not to be hidden”—such as abuse. He described how abusers use impression management to gain a victim’s trust and make them less resistant to abuse. Perpetrators—or those enabling them—then use impression management to hide abuse or explain it away. “If effective, their cover-up is a tragedy that perpetuates abuse and increases its malignancy,” said Mullen.

ENSURE THE WORK CONTINUES

On both Twitter and his website, Mullen points out how churches employ these impression management strategies when abuse is revealed. He recently outlined how often public “apologies” miss the mark of true repentance. Some statements are dismissive of victims’ pain (“I’m sorry you feel that way”) or excuse and minimize behavior (“it was never our intention ...”). Other apologies seek to besmirch the victims in order to maintain

appearances (“the wounded are complicit”) or self-promote, pointing out all the good the organization or person has done in the past and eliciting sympathy (“we are hurting too”).

According to Mullen, Christian organizations are particularly vulnerable to being exploited by abusers because they see themselves as “anointed” and believe “God needs them to help the world.” This is a big problem. “If a group sees themselves as the keystone of Christianity, or progressivism, then they are going to see themselves as irreplaceable and feel the need to protect their legitimacy at all costs,” he explained. Impression management becomes a strategy for Christian organizations to ensure the work continues. Which means, according to Mullen, “there will be more effort to silence those who ask questions, raise concerns, or become vocal about abuse they have encountered.”

This draws more people into the enabler role. Any time a public figure such as Hybels has been accused of abuse, there is a tendency to not believe victims, to downplay the level of abuse, and to rush to “restore” fallen leaders. Mullen believes there are psychological reasons for this: We tend to see the abuser—be it a church leader or a celebrity—suffer in real time. “We see their tears, we see them losing their position,” Mullen said. “But the victim’s story is in the past. We don’t see them losing their prominence, we don’t experience that loss with them. So our sympathies are with the oppressor.” The focus, he insists, should never be on restoring an abuser to power. “The end goal should be the health of that individual, not giving them back their position of power and prominence.”

Understanding how institutions perpetuate or enable abuse is imperative especially for Christians as we continue to grapple with the ramifications of public and private scandals. “The more I grew in my understanding of impression management tactics, the more I started to see that these same tactics were used by the abusers in my own life,” said Mullen. “I began tweeting descriptions of these tactics in 2018 and quickly discovered that I was not alone. Survivors of all types of abuse and from all walks of life began sharing

how the tactics I described were true of their own experience.” Often Mullen’s Twitter feed is full of people recognizing the strategies that have been used against them—such as being told they were not good Christians for questioning the leadership—and finding some modicum of comfort in knowing that they aren’t alone.

Mullen realized these strategies weren’t new, as he studied the Bible for similar tactics and found “their consistent use by evil forces.” He lists a few examples: “The serpent used them to deceive Adam and Eve in the garden (‘Did God say ...?’ Genesis 3:1). King Saul employed at least seven different tactics when he was confronted by the prophet Samuel (see 1 Samuel 15). Judas, one of Jesus’ disciples, betrayed him with a kiss.”

PERPETUAL CONFESSION

What can Christian institutions do to combat these patterns? How can those of us who are connected in some way—as supporters, attenders, audience members, readers—not be a part of enabling abuse and upholding abusive institutions? According to Mullen, this will require truth and transparency, resisting the normal desire for good PR and doing the hard work of looking at the ramifications of actions and theology.

“One thing I would like to see churches doing, including their attendees, is a willingness to put everything on the table for consideration,” Mullen said. “If you believe that abuse is a current and real problem, then we need to demonstrate that we are willing to look at every possible outcome. That would include someone’s theology, their statement of faith, their definition of roles, their power structures. And ask the question: Does this in any way contribute to this problem?” Mullen admits this is hard to do—especially asking people to look clearly at whether their theology leads to abusive patterns. But he still believes it can happen.

Mullen recommends starting with naming harassment and abusive behavior—“identifying experiences, naming them, creating language about them, and creating policies

that protect people from these experiences. Some people are taught what grooming behavior looks like, but [not] what to do with that information. Who do you go to? What happens with the report?” He also recommends coming up with a protection plan that is both trauma- and law-informed, noting that the organization GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) is a good resource for those who want to develop and implement policies to protect potential victims.

Mullen hopes that with more education, the culture can change. The church where he once served eventually invited him “to receive a genuine and thorough public apology from the current leadership, to publicly extend forgiveness to them, and to receive restitution,” says Mullen. “And they’ve since made sweeping changes in personnel and policy.”

Many of us find ourselves tied to institutions where the temptation to engage in enabling behavior is rife. We all have people and ministries that are important to us, that we believe are doing good work, that we are invested in seeing thrive. But Mullen believes we need to change our focus. Instead of putting all our hopes in an organization, we need to be realistic about what can and does happen in them. For Mullen, creating a culture of perpetual confession and restoration is vitally important. “Start with the small stuff—publicly confessing when you have done something inappropriate or wrong—and then it isn’t so much of a bomb when someone does finally confess something bigger.” Building up an ecosystem of protection requires guidelines and thoughtful plans for how to respond to people who have been mistreated and to confront those doing the mistreating.

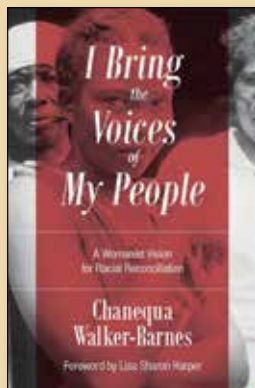
Mullen’s greatest desire is that churches listen to those who have experienced abuse in the past. “And not just listening because you want to get something out of them—listening can sometimes be selfish, [when] you use someone to learn from them,” he said. Rather, he means “listening to suffer with someone. Churches can open their ears to what people are trying to tell them. It means creating a culture where people are willing to share their stories.”

Those stories might appear threatening—like they will take us down or destroy spaces we hold dear. But for Mullen, and many others working to highlight the tactics used to uphold institutions at the expense of those they have harmed, the hope remains: In the ashes of the old, something new and better will be reborn. ✱

D.L. Mayfield lives in Portland, Ore., with her husband and two small children. Her forthcoming book is *The Myth of The American Dream: Reflections on Affluence, Autonomy, Safety, and Power* (March 2020).

“IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT BECOMES A PROBLEM WHEN IT IS DECEPTIVELY USED TO HIDE TRUTHS THAT OUGHT NOT TO BE HIDDEN.”

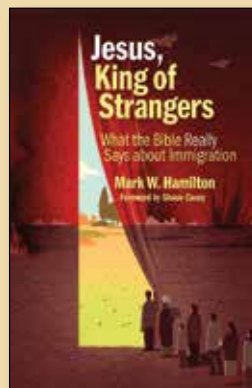
GREAT READS/ Books to inform and inspire



I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation

Chanequa Walker-Barnes
Eerdmans
eerdmans.com

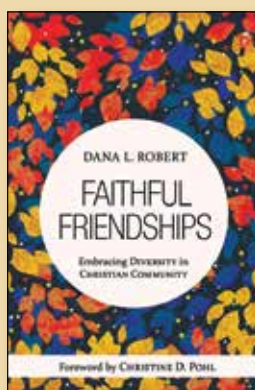
Conversations on Christian community, social justice, and racial reconciliation often neglect women's experiences and expertise. *I Bring the Voices of My People* cries out from the edges, centering on the perspectives of women of color. If we hope to work together toward racial reconciliation, we must listen to their voices.



Jesus, King of Strangers: What the Bible Really Says about Immigration

Mark Hamilton
Eerdmans
eerdmans.com

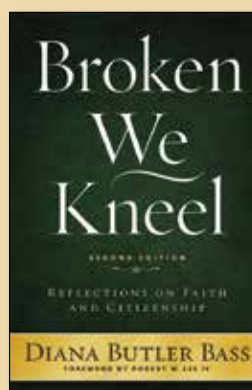
Nationalistic tribalism is on the rise around the world. How we treat strangers (foreigners, immigrants, migrants) is a prominent issue. Drawing on his personal experiences and expertise as a biblical scholar, Hamilton argues that scripture describes God's people as strangers who are called to show grace and hospitality to others.



Faithful Friendships

Dana L. Robert
Eerdmans
eerdmans.com

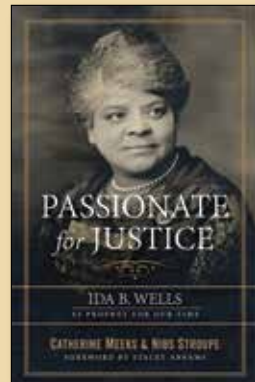
Dana Robert tells the stories of Christians who experienced friendship with people unlike themselves. Christians have the opportunity to be countercultural by making friends across cultural, racial, socioeconomic, and religious lines that separate people from each other. *Faithful Friendships* shows how friendship can become life- and world-changing.



Broken We Kneel: Reflections on Faith and Citizenship (Second Edition)

Diana Butler Bass, with a foreword by Robert W. Lee IV
Church Publishing Incorporated
churchpublishing.org

Drawing on her personal experience as well as her knowledge of religious history, Diana Butler Bass looks at Christian identity, patriotism, citizenship, and congregational life in an attempt to answer the central question that so many are struggling with today: "To whom do Christians owe deepest allegiance? God or country?"



Passionate for Justice: Ida B. Wells as Prophet for Our Time

Catherine Meeks & Nibs Stroupe, with a foreword by Stacey Abrams
Church Publishing Incorporated
churchpublishing.org

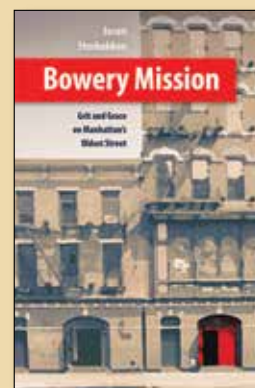
"In *Passionate for Justice*, we find a compass that points us to the future, where we can each give voice and action to justice, equity, and life-giving community. Ida Wells would have had it no other way."—From the foreword by Stacey Abrams, 2018 Democratic nominee for governor of Georgia



Seeing My Skin: A Story of Wrestling with Whiteness

Peter Jarrett-Schell
Church Publishing Incorporated
churchpublishing.org

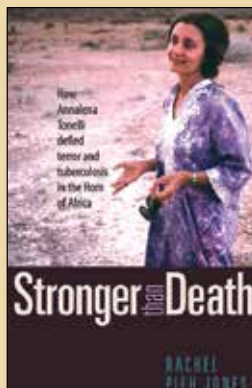
By examining how whiteness has distorted his own perceptions, relationships, and sense of self, Peter Jarrett-Schell argues for the personal stake that white people have in dismantling racism and offers some creative possibilities that emerge.



Bowery Mission: Grit and Grace on Manhattan's Oldest Street

Jason Storbakken
Plough Publishing
plough.com/bowerymission

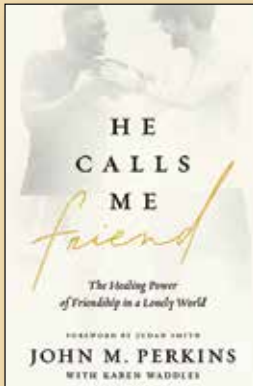
A colorful history of lives rescued on New York City's infamous boulevard of broken dreams, *Bowery Mission* offers a lens through which to better understand the changing faces of homelessness, of American Christianity, and of New York City itself—all of which converge daily at the Bowery Mission's red doors.



Stronger Than Death: How Annalena Tonelli Defied Terror and Tuberculosis in the Horn of Africa

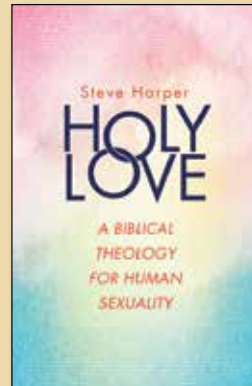
Rachel Pieh Jones
Plough Publishing
plough.com/annalena

"Few of us will ever come close to Annalena Tonelli's devotion and bravery. But thanks to this remarkable book, we can be acquainted with one of history's great and unheralded exemplars."—Tom Krattenmaker, *USA Today* columnist



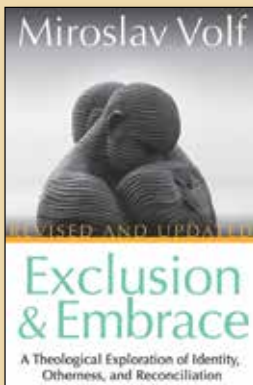
He Calls Me Friend: The Healing Power of Friendship in a Lonely World
John M. Perkins with Karen Waddles
Moody Publishers
moodypublishers.com

Sometimes people ask Dr. Perkins how to make a difference in the world. His simple answer is this: "Be friends. First with God. Then with others—every kind of other you can think of. Because the simple, powerful, messy, explosive truth is: the world is changed one friendship at a time."



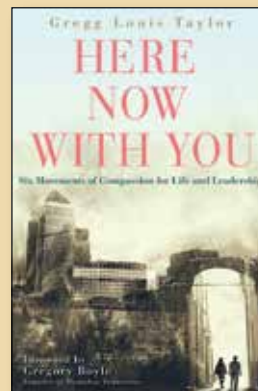
Holy Love: A Biblical Theology for Human Sexuality
Steve Harper
Abingdon Press
abingdonpress.com/holylove

Author Steve Harper strives to articulate the truth about the teachings of the Bible and Wesleyan tradition on human sexuality. This very accessible book will help readers make the constructive case that biblical, Christian teaching is compatible with faithful, covenantal love and intimacy amid all sexual orientations.



Exclusion and Embrace
Revised and Updated: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation
Miroslav Volf
Abingdon Press
abingdonpress.com

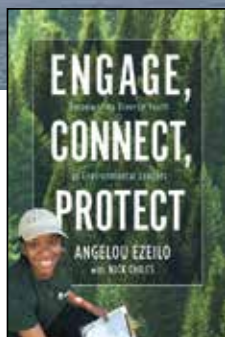
Otherness, the simple fact of being different in some way, has come to be defined as in and of itself evil. Miroslav Volf contends that if the healing word of the gospel is to be heard today, Christian theology must find ways of speaking that address hatred of the other.



Here, Now, With You
Gregg Louis Taylor
Abingdon Press
abingdonpress.com/
herenowwithyou

In *Here, Now, with You*, Gregg Louis Taylor invites you to pay attention to six ways of experiencing God's animating movement of compassion. By learning to be compassionate just as God is, we become authentically connected to one another and expand our awareness of the God who is always here.

Change the story, change the future



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WITH NICK CHILES
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An accessible guide to respond to the inequities faced by persons of color marginalized by mainstream environmentalism.

—Rev. Dr. Dianne Glave, Author,
Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage



Free, Fair, and Alive
The Insurgent Power of the Commons
DAVID BOLLIER
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...shows the path to respond to the ecological emergency and the polarisation of society, economically, socially, culturally... Through commoning we sow the seeds of Earth Democracy and our future.

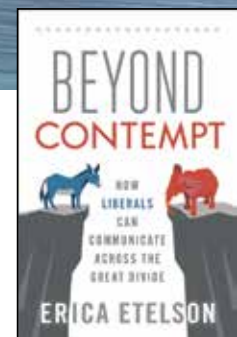
—Vandana Shiva, activist and author,
Earth Democracy



Changing Tides
An Ecologist's Journey to Make Peace with the Anthropocene
ALEJANDRO FRID
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A beautifully crafted journey into how we can change our destructive global culture... Quite simply, this is what real hope looks like.

—J.B. MacKinnon, author, *The Once and Future World*

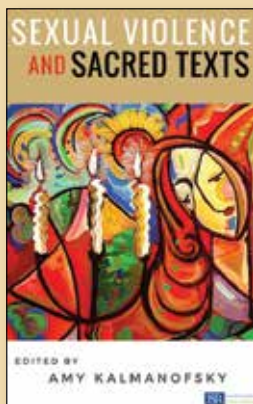


Beyond Contempt
How Liberals Can Communicate across the Great Divide
ERICA ETELSON
\$18.99/AVAILABLE DECEMBER

With this guide, liberals can express themselves in ways that inspire open-minded consideration, rather than defensive rejection, and begin to build bridges and heal a perilously polarized nation.

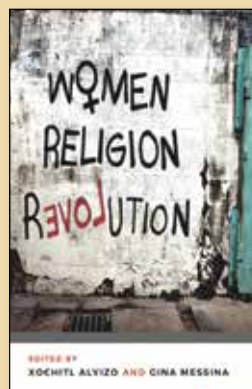


GREAT READS/ Books to inform and inspire



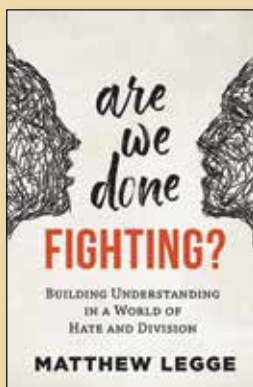
Sexual Violence and Sacred Texts
 Edited by Amy Kalmanofsky
 Feminist Studies in Religion Books
fsrinc.org/all-titles

At the heart of many religions are sacred texts that depict or even incite sexual violence against women. Speaking from Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faith traditions, religiously committed feminist scholars ask here whether such texts can be interpreted in a manner that challenges and promotes healing from such violence.



Women Religion Revolution
 Edited by Xochitl Alviso and Gina Messina
 Feminist Studies in Religion Books
fsrinc.org/all-titles

In a world where women's issues are political issues, feminism and religion are often scripted as opposing sides. This book collects provocative essays written by women who draw on the messages of love and social justice from within their religious traditions to promote positive social change. The book's overarching message: Religion is fueling women's efforts to revolutionize the world!



Are We Done Fighting? Building Understanding in a World of Hate and Division
 Matthew Legge
 New Society Publishers
arewedonefighting.com
 Available in select retail stores and online at arewedonefighting.com

Hate is on the rise. Responding strategically and with care is vital if we're going to turn the tide. But how can we? A lot of our "common sense" approaches don't work, but this book, full of carefully collected research, stories, and practical tips, is poised to be a game changer.



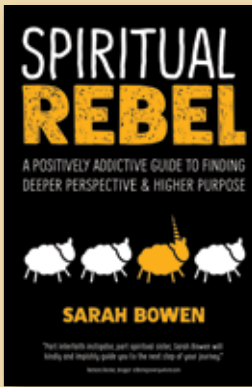
Pilgrim Year
 Steve Bell
 Novalis Publishing
pilgrimyear.com

Journey through the Christian calendar year with Steve Bell's award-winning series, which includes devotional reflections on the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Ordinary Time. Drawing on poetry, music, history, and tradition, Steve's unique reflections animate a rich spiritual tradition for the seasoned and novice alike.



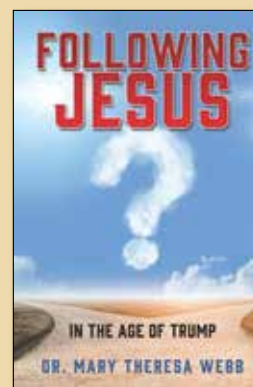
After the Good News: Progressive Faith Beyond Optimism
 Nancy McDonald Ladd
 Skinner House Books
amazon.com

With humor and humanity, Nancy McDonald Ladd calls religious progressives to greater authenticity and truth-telling rather than mere optimism. She charts a course forward that includes reclaiming rituals of atonement and lament, and becoming more vulnerable and accountable in our relationships.



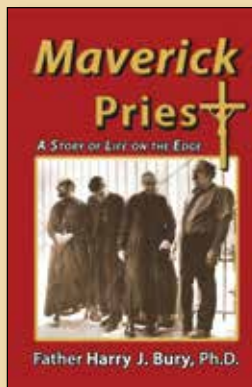
Spiritual Rebel: A Positively Addictive Guide to Finding Deeper Perspective & Higher Purpose
 Sarah Bowen
 Monkfish
spiritual-rebel.com/sojo

Combining sacred wisdom with pop culture, multifaith educator and award-winning author Sarah Bowen delivers a practical, powerful, and enlightening guide to modern spiritual practices for the creative-minded.



Following Jesus in the Age of Trump
 Mary Theresa Webb, PhD
 Xulon Press
followingjesusintrumpage.com

Through biblically based teaching and referring to other historical periods, the author explores the significance of discovering the deception and dangers present in the political climate in America today. The author encourages evangelical Christians to reflect on the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' life and teachings to direct them along the Jesus pathway.



Maverick Priest: A Story of Life on the Edge
 Father Harry J. Bury
 Robert D. Reed Publishers
rdrpublishers.com

This is the story of one man's unique journey around the world in the name of human connection, peace, and active nonviolence, described by Arun Gandhi as "a remarkable man of God who, in a real sense, devoted his life to living the life of a true Christian."

IBRAM X. KENDI IS SHOWING BELIEVERS AND NONBELIEVERS ALIKE HOW TO BECOME ANTIRACIST.



S

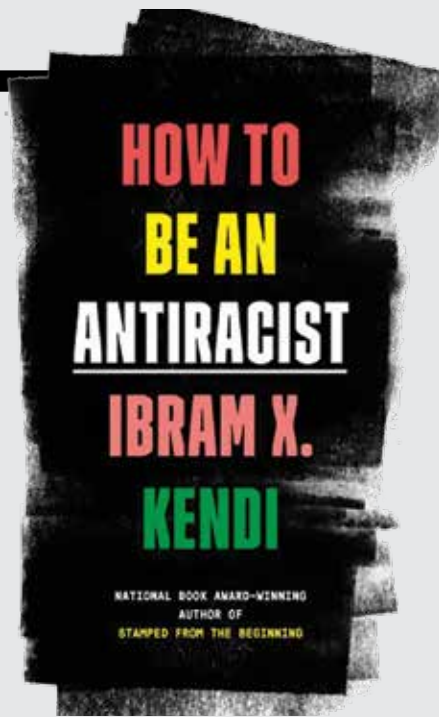
Somewhere in America, surely there lies a graveyard filled with racist bones. It's abandoned and dry as Ezekiel's valley. No one is asking if these bones can live, least of all the many people who proclaim they don't have a racist bone in their body. Better they turn to dust, lest they be DNA-tested and matched.

But Ibram X. Kendi is laying claim to his. Founding director of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University in D.C. and award-winning author of *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive*

Memoir

History of Racist Ideas in America, Kendi identifies his own racist beliefs and actions in his latest book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, a deeply researched blend of history, sociology, law, and memoir.

"One of the central messages in *How to Be an Antiracist* is that we're all on a personal journey to move away from our upbringing in a racist nation. And that journey must be deeply self-reflective and self-critical," Kendi told me. "This is hard



work. It's easy to be racist. It's extremely hard to be antiracist. But it's possible, and I wanted to model how we could do that." Kendi defines a racist as anyone (including a person of color like himself) "who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea." Likewise, an antiracist is anyone "who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea."

These descriptions "are not permanent tattoos," Kendi writes, marking a person as racist for life, but rather like sticky name tags that can be placed and re-placed depending upon what a person is doing—or not doing. "It's critical to become an active force in creating an equitable society, and to be a part of those forces that are challenging those policies that create inequity. And we all have a role to play."

Kendi's parents, Larry and Carol Rogers, were student activists who attended InterVarsity's Urbana 70 Student Missions Conference nearly 50 years ago, drawn to the gathering by the band Soul Liberation and an evangelist named Tom Skinner. Skinner spoke of a Jesus who looked nothing like the white man in serene profile found on so many Sunday school classroom walls. Rather, as Kendi recounts in *How to Be an Antiracist*, Skinner said Jesus "was a radical revolutionary with hair on his chest and dirt under his fingernails," and any true reading of the gospel must speak to issues of enslavement, justice, and inequality.

While black liberation theology kept his parents in the church, what Kendi calls "savior theology," or using Christ to save "backward" people from their own misguided ways, drove him away. "This [belief] goes hand in hand with racist thought," he said, "that the fundamental problem of societies is the inferiorities of people, and that is the reason why we have so many inequities."

"Many millennials [like Ibram] have left the church because they see it accommodating systems in this world, rather than being prophetic and speaking out against them," Carol Rogers told me. Kendi's approach is focused

on making policy changes—efforts that any church aiming to be antiracist could adopt.

"In that sort of church, following this revolutionary Jesus would be seeking to organize its people and resources to be a part of campaigns of change," Kendi says.

But what about churches that object to organizing and advocating for policy change, calling these activities too political?

"I would respond that *not* engaging in campaigns of policy change is political, too," Kendi said. "Just like a person who votes is doing a political act that decides an election, those who don't vote engage in political acts that decide elections."

Larry Rogers concurred: "When Jesus went against religious leaders of his day, wasn't he being political?"

The chapter on activism in *How to Be an Antiracist* might discourage some readers. It's titled "Failure." But a person who writes "I arrived at Temple [University] as a racist, sexist, homophobe" isn't looking to spare feelings. To Kendi, showing up at rallies and demonstrations is often about feeling less guilty. "Critiquing racism is not activism. Changing minds is not activism," he writes. "What if we focused our human and fiscal resources on changing power and policy to actually make society, not just our feelings, better?"

Yet when Kendi spoke of what gives him hope, he mentioned the people who *have* shown up—movements against police brutality and sexual violence and harassment, and in support of gay rights. Likewise, although he might not classify changing minds as activism, he recognizes the importance of building relationships and trust to have difficult conversations around race and racism.

In a sense, Kendi is looking to take the sting out of the word "racist."

"I do think [being racist] is bad, but I also think it is normal. That's one of the messages I've tried to show in my work, to look at ourselves and say, 'Yeah, I'm racist, and that's quite normal, because of how our parents, our teachers, our media, our churches have taught us to be.'

"In other words, you weren't born a racist. You have been trained and nurtured to be this way. And so therefore you have to turn a different corner." ❖

**"SAVIOR
THEOLOGY' GOES
HAND IN HAND
WITH RACIST
THOUGHT."**

Kimberly Burge is author of *The Born Frees: Writing with the Girls of Gugulethu*.

On Screen



Mitski

HER PARTICULAR OBJECTIFICATION

By Chris Karnadi

In a small venue, I watched Mitski perch on a white chair behind a white table, fold her hands, and start to sing emotional ballads.

The 29-year-old musician was performing in Carrboro, N.C., from her fifth studio album, *Be the Cowboy*. It's one of my favorites from 2018 and plays with the American cowboy mythology in its loneliness ("My God, I'm so lonely ... still nobody wants me,") and longing ("I just can't be without you").

I expected a typical concert, hearing favorite songs and seeing Mitski's personality. But I was jarred by the lack of emotion she showed. The entire time she sang, her face was resolute and hardened, a seeming contradiction with her heartrending lyrics.

Second, she danced sensually, even while her face remained impassive. She wore nothing "sexy"—a white T-shirt, biker shorts, and kneepads—as she executed carefully choreographed sequences. But she leaned forward, slanted her hips, and flicked her hair. She climbed onto the table and spread her legs toward the audience. Yet she never broke a smile, never performed the emotion of eroticism.

A man interrupted: "I love you, Mitski!" But did he?

Mitski's performance was a trap for assumptions. She offered deeply personal songs to people who don't know her personally. She performed positions of intimacy, but assuming that she was offering intimacy was a mistake.

As two queer Asian-American women and I drank beers at a nearby bar after Mitski's performance, they revealed levels to the experience that I had not registered as an Asian-American male. What I saw as a contradiction between Mitski's singing, dancing, and lack of facial

expression, they knew as a powerful inversion of expectations for Asian women in America.

Theorist Anne Anlin Cheng describes the "yellow woman" and her particular objectification as "a figure whose survival is secured through crushing objecthood." She is an "aesthetic presence that is prized and despoiled."

What Mitski performed was a revelation. She traced assumptions imposed on an Asian female body—that she is sexually available, demure, and cute; at the same time, she asserted control of the space and her body, pulling through practically an entire Pilates routine without taking a heavy breath.

She was in charge, completely ignoring the man who yelled his love at her.

After leaving the bar, my friends and I waited outside the venue: I wanted to meet Mitski. The band emerged and waved, but she didn't appear.

Maybe in hoping for a meeting, I was seeking an intimacy that Mitski wasn't offering. She owes me nothing. I don't know her, and that's the point. ❖

Chris Karnadi is an assistant editor of Duke Divinity's Faith and Leadership.

New & Noteworthy

NOTES ON COMPASSION

In Kishi Bashi's fourth studio album, *Omoiyari*, he examines what history can teach us about America today. The forced relocation and internment of more than 117,000 Japanese Americans during World War II is evoked through poignant lyrics that paint parallels between then and now.

Joyful Noise



Just a Child

Separated by the Border: A Birth Mother, a Foster Mother, and a Migrant Child's 3,000-Mile Journey focuses on Julia, one of many children who made their way from Honduras to the U.S.-Mexico border in 2017. Interweaving narrative and research, Gena Thomas tells a personal story of immigration and love.

IVP



Intricate Life

White Dancing Elephants, a collection of short stories by Chaya Bhuvaneshwar, presents tales set in a dystopia, our modern world, and even the 16th century. Immigrant women of color are most of the protagonists in this debut, which explores conflicts of race, gender, queerness, religion, and violence.

Dzanc Books

SOCIAL MEDIA REAPS WHAT IT SOWS

By
**Danny Duncan
 Collum**



Eyes & Ears

Every U.S. president since Richard Nixon has complained about his news coverage. But the man who lives in the White House now is doing something about it.

In August, *Politico* reported that the Trump administration is drafting an executive order to counter “liberal” bias in story selection and search results on the platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Google (owner of YouTube). According to this report, both the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission may be tasked with enforcing the neutrality of the digital platforms and the algorithms that prioritize stories and topics.

“Social media bias” must work well as a Republican fundraising pitch, because the administration and its allies in Congress have been harping on it for the past year. In September 2018, Twitter chief Jack Dorsey was hauled before the (then-Republican-controlled) House Energy and Commerce Committee and roasted over arcane and unproven claims of his company’s anti-conservative bias. The next day, Jeff Sessions (then still U.S. attorney general) called a meeting of his state-level counterparts to discuss possible actions against the alleged bias.

Conspiracist
 Alex Jones, now
 banned from
 Facebook

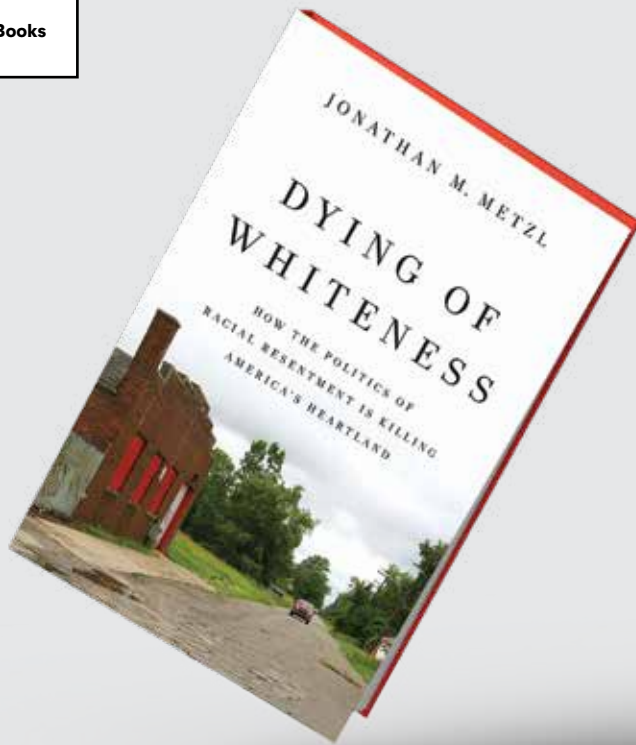
In May 2019, after Facebook banned the right-wing conspiracy monger Alex Jones, the White House launched a website for Americans to lodge their complaints about social media bias. Then, in July, it hosted a White House social media summit attended by such luminaries as James O’Keefe, the purveyor of fraudulently edited undercover videos, Bill Mitchell, a promoter of the deeply twisted Q-Anon conspiracy theory, and some far-right meme-*meister* who calls himself Carpe Donktum. No one representing Facebook, Google, or Twitter was invited.

The right-wing campaign to intimidate social media companies goes back at least to summer 2016. Back then, a news report appeared in which former Facebook staffers claimed that right-wing news sources were deliberately excluded from what was then the “Trending Stories” box on Facebook. Statistical studies of Trending Stories showed no evidence of such bias, but, in a moment of profound cowardice, Facebook responded by eliminating human editors from the story selections and relying on an algorithm. As a result, utterly false items were prominently promoted in the “trending” box, such as one claiming that TV news personality Megyn Kelly, then still at Fox News, was about to be fired (which she wasn’t) for supporting Hillary Clinton (which she didn’t).

The irony here is that social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, essentially created the Trump administration. No doubt most Silicon Valley executives voted for Hillary Clinton, but they also averted their eyes from those Russian bots spreading false stories and kept staffers on-site at Trump headquarters, to advise the campaign on the most effective use of its social media ad dollars. And, to this day, Fox News is the most shared news source on Facebook.

Social media has a bias all right, but it has nothing to do with political ideology. As you may have heard somewhere, “It’s all about the Benjamins.” ❖

Danny Duncan Collum, author of the novel *White Boy*, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.



THE AUTHOR CALCULATES THE YEARS OF LIFE LOST DUE TO POOR POLITICAL DECISIONS ROOTED IN WHITE SUPREMACY.

white supremacist ideology is that even though any given white person may need help, there are far more black and brown people who will exploit the system. This fear says white folks must take every precaution to avoid being taken advantage of. In Tennessee, Metzl reports, “many white men ... voiced a willingness to die, literally, rather than embrace a law [the Affordable Care Act] that gave minority or immigrant persons more access to care, even if it helped them as well.”

Metzl thus takes ideology seriously as a factor in his subject’s lives and political choices. They are not victims of misinformation but often sacrifice their health and kids for a vision of autonomy and power that doesn’t satisfy, something Metzl calls, quoting historian Georg Lipsitz, a “possessive investment in whiteness.”

Stylistically, *Dying of Whiteness* reads like a series of magazine articles united by a loose theme: how white folks are punished by their choice of whiteness. But often the connection does a disservice to the ideas behind the book by keeping Metzl from exploring any element in appropriate depth. Likewise, tying the trau-

ma Kansas suffered with public school funding cuts to public health is weak—as Metzl himself recognizes—but necessary to make the broader theme work. Each individual argument would be stronger if Metzl had the space and time to explore freely, and they don’t gain by being juxtaposed.

So why should Christians care about this? Christ died to free us from sin, which means he died to free all of us, regardless of race, from the demonic power of whiteness. *Dying of Whiteness* shows us what we’re up against: entrenched ideologies that push people away from life and make them so eager for superiority that they welcome death. The church must make a concerted political, intellectual, and spiritual effort to overcome this darkness. It can be defeated. It will just take an exorcism. ✕

Greg Williams works in digital communications at an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C.

POSSESSED BY IDEOLOGY

Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America’s Heartland,
by Jonathan M. Metzl

Basic Books

Imagine a man seized by a demon. He cannot be bound by chains or confined within walls. He is a danger to himself and everyone around him. In *Dying of Whiteness*, Jonathan M. Metzl lays out a compelling case that white folks are so convinced of an ideology of whiteness that we are willing to kill, and even to die, for it. One Christian way to talk about this would be to say that white people are possessed.

In his book, Metzl examines three public health case studies: gun culture in Missouri, particularly white male suicide; the failure to expand Medicaid in Tennessee; and the gutting of public schools under cruel budget and tax policies in Kansas. For each, he calculates the years of life lost because of poor political decisions made under an ideology of white supremacy.

This ideology promotes individual autonomy, downplaying social responsibility and the corporate benefits of working together. The nonfactual fear central to



COMPLICATED REALITIES

American Journal: Fifty Poems for Our Time, selected and introduced by Tracy K. Smith

Graywolf Press

T

The word that comes to mind when considering *American Journal: Fifty Poems for Our Time* is *gift*. Edited by former U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, this anthology of poems from 50 living American poets addresses the nation with generosity. In her introduction, Smith describes *American Journal*

as “an offering” for us to expand, renew, or establish our relationship with poetry and each other. She writes that she loves poems because they invite her to “sit still, listen deeply, and imagine putting [herself] in someone else’s unfamiliar shoes.”

American Journal presents 50 different takes on the American experience: a school field trip (“The Field Trip,” by Ellen Bryant Voigt); war (“Personal Effects,” by Solmaz Sharif); the shouldering of inequity on young, brilliant lives (“Mighty Pawns,” by Major Jackson); addiction (“My Brother at 3 AM,” by Natalie Diaz); work (“Minimum Wage,” by Matthew Dickman); language (“Music from Childhood,” by John Yau); and hope (“For the Last American Buffalo,” by Steve Scafidì).

Organized into five sections that draw on internal words and themes, the anthology expresses a collective voice that highlights each poem’s singularity. One section comprises a single poem, “38” by Layli Long Soldier, which recalls the execution of the Dakota 38 under President Abraham Lincoln. “38” reclaims suppressed memory, unravels myths of national progress, and—speaking as

much to the present as to the past (“The previous sentence is circular, akin to so many aspects of history.”)—dispels any notion of *American Journal* as patriotic paean.

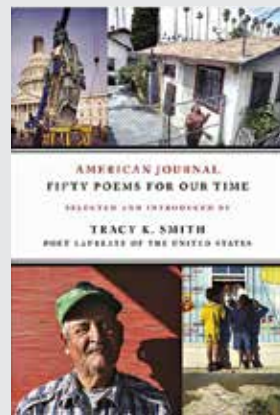
At the same time, praise is endemic to the volume. Our need for celebration intensifies in the midst of complicated realities. “N’em” by Jericho Brown honors the old folks and old ways, whose wisdom is our forgotten inheritance (“They fed / Families with change and wiped / Their kitchens clean.”). In a country of quotidian gun violence, “Proximities” by Lia Purpura understands life to be a paradoxical gift known only in absence and inverse (“Not-shot-at / and I never knew it.”).

American Journal is the result of Tracy K. Smith’s project to engage poetry in rural communities, from Alaska to South Carolina to Maine. The book is both product and producer of empathy-fostering conversations. Its title is from the poem “[American Journal],” by Robert Hayden, the first African American to serve as what became known as the U.S. Poet Laureate. In it, an alien visiting from outer space finds striking similarities and differences between inhabitants of the U.S. and his own people. At the end of the poem, the essence of American identity remains unnamed.

“Who are we?” is a question that has surfaced with urgency in our nation. In response, Smith brings us poetry, an embrace of our lives and gifts. That, perhaps, is all the answer we need. ✦

Above: Former U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith

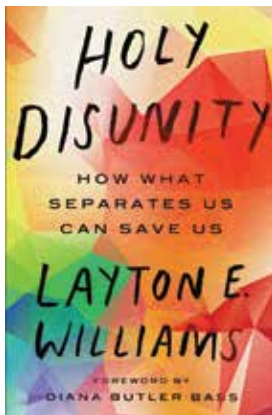
Jeania Ree V. Moore is a United Methodist deacon who works in faith-based social justice in Washington, D.C.



BEAUTY IN CACOPHONY

An excerpt from
Holy Disunity: How What
Separates Us Can Save Us,
by Layton E. Williams

Westminster John Knox Press



Disunity is so often seen as an evil: the breakdown of relationship, of community, of cohesion. But disunity doesn't have to mean destruction. In the arguments and protests born from our disunited state, we hear hard but important truths that push back on our assumptions and our hubris. In our willingness to confront our own doubts, and others', about things we've always assumed to be true, we are invited to discover new and deeper understandings of truth. In disunity, our differences and limitations and failures clash against one another, sometimes violently, but those clashes can also be an invitation for us to be stretched and expanded—or at least to understand that the world and humanity are more expansive than any one of us. Our hunger can turn us into enemies, seeking to deprive one another so that we ourselves might have enough. But our hunger also reminds us that we need more than ourselves; we are not sufficient alone. And even when our disunity puts us utterly and irrevocably at odds, when it demands that we be separate, that gulf between us offers space for each of us to grow—perhaps even toward each other.

Disunity is tense. But in that tension we catch a glimpse of the wondrous complexity of God and God's creation. The universe is made up of an infinite chorus of voices, and we have been taught to see the beauty of harmony, all those voices aligned. But there is beauty in cacophony as well—and it is the beauty of hearing just how many voices there are, of realizing that humanity and God's good creation do not always look like us or even like what we understand. Embracing the holiness of disunity doesn't mean seeing beauty or purpose in every opinion or argument; it means seeing that there is beauty and purpose in every person and maybe in the discord itself. Disunity is stretching us, pushing us—both together and apart, refining us, and along with all the other holy work of God, making something new. Even in the negative space between us, God is making new creation. And because God is there working in the negative space even as God is at work in us, we are still all bound up together in God, and even in our disunity, we are, somehow, connected to one another.

I believe the disunity we find ourselves in has the power to save us, if we listen to it and learn from it and allow ourselves to be transformed by it. ❖

**EVEN IN THE
NEGATIVE SPACE
BETWEEN US,
GOD IS MAKING
NEW CREATION.**

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Poetry

THE RED THAT COLORED THE WORLD

Exhibition, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico

By Julie L. Moore



Darling of Mayans, Incas, and Aztecs, cochineal
conquered the ever-expanding world—
borne of female coccids boiled, dried, and ground
fine as dust, then woven with water, coaxing color
vibrant as any pink peppercorn, dye so prized,
long before Spain came, natives bred the prickly pear
on which the insects fed to bear fewer spines,
so, horsetail in hand, they could brush the parasites

from the cactus with greater ease,
not bleed the hue they were reaping
like they did once the ships blew in,
when colonists (*O, how we whites have sinned!*)
gazed at their indigenous skin, branding
them a *race*, searing sacrilege on their sacred land.

Julie L. Moore attends Real Community Covenant Church in Marion, Ind. Her most recent collection of poetry is *Full Worm Moon*.

Above, ground cochineal insects used for dye.



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Practices of Prayer, Worship, and Community

Jan. 30–Feb. 1, 2020 / The University of the South / Sewanee, Tenn.

In this two-part educational and experiential series for clergy and laypeople, we'll explore two aspects of congregational vitality: cultivating practices that invite Christ's indwelling presence in both ordained leaders and in communities, and processes for creating dynamic and transformative worship that stirs the senses and opens the heart. Participants will leave refreshed, inspired, and prepared with tools and resources for engaging ministry.

Growing Faith. Transforming Lives.

Visit bit.ly/em-2020 for more information and to register.



WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN?

Scripture passages
are from the Revised
Common Lectionary,
Cycle C.

By Kenyatta R. Gilbert



Living the Word

This November cycle of lectionary readings encourages our stillness and trust in God in times of persecution (Psalm 46). It also asks us to reconsider the signs and wonders of Jesus'

public ministry as an invitation into his redemptive plan.

In Luke 19, Jesus extends mercy in the form of table fellowship to the wealthy and despised chief tax collector Zacchaeus, setting off alarms. Everyone who saw divine hospitality in motion "began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner'" (verse 7). The taxation system of which Zacchaeus is a part, by profession and association, is no doubt inherently corrupt and socially abusive. Ironically, salvation comes to Zacchaeus with "breaking of bread," table fellowship, and in the context of divine hospitality.

Luke 20 presents one of several vignettes that raise questions about the nature and origin of Jesus' authority. Here a dispute pits Sadducees, the keepers of the Torah who do not believe in resurrection, against Jesus, the rabbi who scrambles and puzzles their logic. What is revealed is a strictness of theological imagination on the Sadducees' part and radical truth-telling grounded in well-timed perception on the part of Jesus. Then in Luke 21, Jesus foretells terror, the kind which we 21st-century, world-redemption seekers would do well to hear: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes ... famines and plagues ... and great signs from heaven" (verses 10-11). You will be hated, Jesus says, but "by your endurance you will gain your souls" (verse 19).

Kenyatta R. Gilbert, founding director of The Preaching Project, is professor of homiletics at Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, D.C. He is author of *A Pursued Justice* and *Exodus Preaching*.

RESURRECTION IS THE BELIEVER'S GATEWAY TO HOPE.

NOVEMBER 3

RECLAIMING HOSPITALITY

HABAKKUK 1:1-4, 2:1-4; PSALM 119:137-144;
2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-4, 11-12; LUKE 19:1-10

A crowd gathers in Jericho near the end of Jesus' public ministry. Zacchaeus, Facebook's first-century forerunner, climbs up a tree so that he can surveil the commotion below undetected. He voyeurs unnoticed, so he thinks. But Jesus beckons him down and says, "You are hosting me today." Zacchaeus assents. Jesus doesn't ask Zacchaeus to confess faith but simply shows up with salvation. Zacchaeus recites no doctrinal statement. Everything about this passage explodes our theological litmus tests. One might venture to constrain this passage to Calvinistic, syllogistic reasoning about conditional and unconditional election and still not close the loop on divine mystery here. Jesus requires nothing of Zacchaeus; only to host him in his home. To Zacchaeus' amazement, Jesus saves him and his household on the spot.

Zacchaeus intends to prove that he is not one of the "bad ones" by pledging his commitment to gift the poor with half of his wealth to demonstrate his gratitude for salvation (verse 8), yet we assume he might continue his participation in an evil system that he is likely not going to challenge or change. In capitalistic economies that require some to accept fixed status for others to prosper, even the most well-intentioned privileged persons are complicit in the maintenance of systemic evil. Any system that works against human flourishing and blunts the social progress and upward mobility of America's working poor is necessarily sinful and at worst evil. If

America's most socially vulnerable citizens find themselves trapped in economically distressed communities—where poverty abounds and persons are caught in the crosswinds of unscrupulous payday-lending practices and high rents—while social policies protect the interests of the state and the top 20 percent holds 77 percent of household wealth, then no person of means escapes such a system with clean hands.

NOVEMBER 10

ABSURD QUESTIONS

HAGGAI 1:15B · 2:9; PSALM 145:1-5, 17-21; 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-5, 13-17; LUKE 20:27-38

Can life arise from death? In Luke 20, the Sadducees pose a tricky question. Resurrection is not resuscitation or reanimation of the physical self; rather, according to Reginald H. Fuller, it signals the active work of a divine sovereign to bring about a complete psychosomatic transformation of the human body. Resurrection is an absurd notion unless one's faith claim is premised on the assumption that the historical process is not theologically closed. What resurrection symbolizes is that only a God who raises life from death stands outside the expectation, prediction, and horizon of human control.

The Sadducees ask Jesus whose wife a widow will be in the resurrection if she had been given in marriage to seven brothers in succession (verses 28-33a), a reference to Levirate marriage practices. The absurdity of the question points to the absurdity of the belief in the resurrection. The Sadducees are asking the wrong question. Jesus says: "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage but those who are considered worthy ... in the resurrection from the dead they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (verses 34-35). The afterlife is different from life on earth, Jesus explains, because the world of the present reality is not the only reality there is.

Resurrection is the believer's gateway to hope, and to believe in resurrection's power in faith gets to the very heart of why the church exists. Empirical datum will never sufficiently verify what the heart of faith knows—that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus honors our faith and promotes human flourishing. Our God "is not God of the dead but of the living" (verse 38). Any questions?

NOVEMBER 17

THE DAY IS COMING

MALACHI 4:1-2A; PSALM 98; 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-13; LUKE 21:5-19

"Not one stone will be left upon another!" Jesus warns. False messiahs—the Koreshian type—will come to lead you astray, saying, "I am he." Don't believe them!

How ominous a sermon this must have been for Jesus' audience. The twin forces of holy terror and holy grace are in a full-on scrimmage, competing for the souls of those hearing this messianic prediction. Given the immediacy and apocalyptic tenor of Jesus' words, it is hardly evident that any good news is to be found in Luke 21. "What will be the sign?" his followers inquire. In short, he replies: tough times. "They will arrest you and persecute you" because of my name, and you will seek asylum, be detained, and separated from relatives; even they will betray you (verse 12). But those who hold onto faith, says Jesus, will have the right words and will have their lives preserved (verses 15, 17-19).

Now if Jesus' depictions of the end are hard to stomach, the prophet Malachi's doomsday pronouncements are more terrifying. The time of judgment is coming "like a hot furnace. All the proud people will be punished. All the evil people will burn like straw" (Malachi 4:1). But the righteous who revere God "shall go out leaping like calves from the stall" (verse 2). As we see the gross misdeeds of our country's highest elected official with the approval of many religious people, we too must ask of Jesus, "Are these the times spoken of long ago?" While we mustn't overlay our 21st-century dilemma on these texts, we who are alive and remain Christ's followers must in every age ask of a living and speaking God, "What will be the sign of your coming?" May those awaiting the

STILLNESS BEFORE GOD OPENS WIDE THE SOUL'S DOOR.

Lord's arrival, after having pursued righteousness and righteous causes, be found making "a joyful noise before the Lord" (Psalm 98:6).

NOVEMBER 24

BEING STILL

JEREMIAH 23:1-6; PSALM 46; COLOSSIANS 1:11-20; LUKE 23:33-43

When I was a child I couldn't be still. I can't tell you how many times I heard the question, "Do you have ants in your pants?" I felt that I couldn't—and didn't want to—be still.

Scripture teaches the importance of stillness. The psalmist declares, "Be still and know I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10). If individuals are to approach God in meaningful encounter, they must first acknowledge that God is not only the creator and ruler of all living creatures but is also a God who "bottoms existence," to use the language of Howard Thurman. According to this psalm, Israel's God is the only god worthy of worship. Nations form, crumble, and dissolve. God sits ever present with God's own creation. As preceding verses declare, God provides refuge and strength, comes to our aid, ends hostility, and makes wars cease (verses 1, 9). Stillness before God opens wide the soul's door. Thurman points this out when he writes: "There is very great virtue in the cultivation of silence, and strength to be found in using it as a door to God. Such a door opens within. When I have quieted down, I must spend some time in self-examination in the Presence of God."

We cannot begin to see who we truly are without self-examination. If we are unwilling to sit silently before God, then we should not expect to obtain any sound insight into our purpose for living. Revelation for properly identifying God's will for our lives is best obtained through encounter with the Sovereign in whom the power of life and death is held. To sit quietly before a speaking God is to encounter a glorious power made manifest in the firstborn of all creation, Jesus Christ—in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Colossians 1:15, 19). ❖

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumps



HEAPING SCORN (when nothing less will do)

By Ed Spivey Jr.

With the election only a year away, our nation is hopelessly divided between good people on one side and painfully foolish people on the other. The only thing that can bring us together is to find common ground and agree that the second group is completely out of their minds.

Nah, that won't work. Because as much as you want righteous retribution brought down on your crazy uncle, he's not the real problem. He's just the pawn of greater forces that feed his tiny, brittle mind that nonetheless figured out how to get seconds on turkey before you.

No, the real deplorables are the super wealthy who, since the Reagan presidency, have built a conservative infrastructure that controls Congress and undermines our democracy. The Mercers, the Kochs, the Walmartons, and their kind have financed the seeds of our disharmony and inequality by lobbying for tax breaks, denying climate change, and supporting divisive social media. They should be the real targets of our wrath, nonviolently of course, because we're still stickin' with Jesus and that cheek of his.

For peacemakers, shunning and shaming are still the best strategy. I'm fully prepared to give a cold shoulder to Charles Koch if I ever see him at Home Depot. If Sheldon Adelson shows up at my dry cleaners when I'm there to get barbecue sauce out of a suit coat (who serves barbecue at a wedding?!),

**SOMETIMES THE OLD TESTAMENT
SAYS IT BEST: NAME. SHAME.
REPEAT.**

he'll feel the wrath of my silent stare. And pity a Walmart heir in line at Chipotle. I'll cut right in front of him or her before they can choose between crispy or soft tacos. Because these people are dead to me.

As for shaming, the Old Testament contains predictably stern counsel. Proverbs suggests heaping hot coals on the wicked, an ancient concept that still carries an undeniable appeal. Although I would let the coals come to room temperature first, to avoid inflicting pain and a lengthy but pampered healing process at an exclusive spa; just lots of unsightly charcoal dust and darkish smears on their shirts, much like how I look after a wedding reception. Okay, during a wedding reception.

If no coals are available, there are always water balloons. Small ones, of course, nothing dangerous, but a frequent enough threat that the oligarchs will duck every time they step out of their limousines. If we are powerless to stop them, at least we can make them fidgety in the open air. In the name of justice, I want them to fear the skies. Because there may be a balloon up there with their name on it (or perhaps "Congrats on the New Baby!" if the closest source is a hospital gift shop).

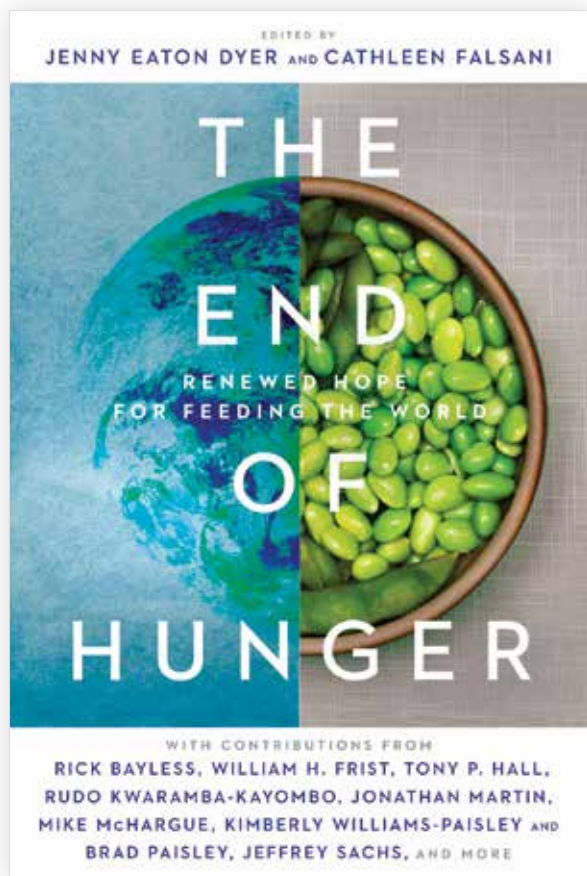
Not to mention the occasional pie.

Whipped cream pie, to be precise, thrown with accuracy and timing, the classic act of postmodern resistance. It's poignant, newsworthy, and telegenic. And there is *no* dignified way to wipe whipped cream out of your eyes, praise the Lord, no recourse but to stop toasting the new Supreme Court justice you just purchased and leave the podium. (Note to deserving victims: Don't lick your fingers. Most protest pies are filled with shaving cream, cheaper than dairy and in deference to Aristotle's greatest oratory: "Never waste a good pie on a bad man.")

But if it's real cream, may the victim be lactose intolerant, and start licking. ♦

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of *Sojourners* magazine.

WE CAN END WORLD HUNGER



JESUS' COMMAND IS CLEAR: WE ARE CALLED TO FEED ALL OF GOD'S CHILDREN. BUT IS THAT POSSIBLE?

THE CHALLENGES ARE GREAT, BUT THE FIGHT TO ELIMINATE GLOBAL MALNUTRITION AND HUNGER IS ONE WE CAN WIN.



"The call to 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' is also a call to come together and ensure everyone has food at the table. In the Franciscan tradition we remember that creation is the first Bible, and we can see there is enough to go around while many are yet hungry. The End of Hunger shows us the way to get there by 2030."

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